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ESSAY  
ON  
THE AUTHENTICITY  
OF  
THE POEMS OF OSSIAN.

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Entered in Stationers Hall.

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*Edwin Stewart Murray*  
1870

ESSAY

ON

THE AUTHENTICITY

OF THE

**POEMS OF OSSIAN;**

IN WHICH

*THE OBJECTIONS*

OF

MALCOLM LAING, Esq.

ARE

PARTICULARLY CONSIDERED AND REFUTED.

BY

PATRICK GRAHAM, D. D.

MINISTER OF ABERFOYLE.

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TO WHICH IS ADDED AN ESSAY

ON

THE MYTHOLOGY OF OSSIAN'S POEMS,

BY

PROFESSOR RICHARDSON

OF GLASGOW COLLEGE.

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1807.





TO  
HIS GRACE  
THE DUKE OF ATHOLL,  
PRESIDENT,  
AND THE OTHER NOBLEMEN AND GENTLEMEN  
OF THE  
*HIGHLAND SOCIETY OF SCOTLAND,*  
THE PROPER PATRONS OF CELTIC LITERATURE,  
THIS ESSAY  
ON  
THE POEMS OF OSSIAN  
IS  
MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED  
BY  
THE AUTHOR.



## INTRODUCTION.

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IT may appear to many, that the endurance of the public has been long ago exhausted, by the disquisitions which have been offered concerning the æra of the poems ascribed to Ossian. To many persons, it has appeared to be a matter of little consequence whether these poems are to be considered as ancient or modern; whether they are to be regarded as the production of

the Son of Fingal, or of a learned Scot of the eighteenth century.

Were this merely a question in which national vanity was concerned, it is admitted that it is a matter of little importance, whether this celebrated poetry is to be attributed to one of our countrymen, who lived in the *third*, or in the *eighteenth*, century. It is conceived, however, that the question involves much more important considerations: it is presumed, that the general history of literature, and even that of the human mind itself, are deeply interested in its investigation.

If, on the one hand, it be found, that the poems ascribed to Ossian were composed fifteen hundred years ago, in a language and dialect which are still understood and spoken in the High-

lands of Scotland, a very singular view, surely, presents itself, of the condition in which society must have existed in a country and period which have been usually accounted barbarous; and, from this view, an enquiring mind will be naturally led to carry its researches farther into the history and manners of the early inhabitants of Caledonia.

If, on the other hand, it be ascertained, that these poems were composed by a contemporary, imbued, as Mr Macpherson certainly was, in a very respectable measure, with the literature of Greece and Rome, as well as of modern times, we are presented with a phenomenon still more inexplicable. That such a person should have produced a body of poetry, which has been justly considered as posses-

sing so high a merit as “ to have given  
“ a new tone to poetry throughout all  
“ Europe;”\* but, at the same time, devoid of all modern allusion, and formed neither in its imagery or expression on the model of those ancient authors, who have communicated their peculiar colouring, so generally, to all modern compositions ; appears to be a circumstance still more strange, than the supposition of the high antiquity which has been ascribed to it.

In this point of view, then, it should seem, that the question of the antiquity and authenticity of these poems, must always be considered as interesting, not only to literature, but even to the philosophy of the human mind.

\* Edinburgh Review, No. XII. Art. 7.

At a very early period in this controversy, Dr Johnson, a man whose name must ever be held in veneration by the friends of literature and virtue, but who appears to have been very unqualified, on account of his prejudices, and his too slight investigation of this subject, to form a just estimate of its merits, decisively pronounced these poems to be a modern imposture. The sum of Dr Johnson's argument, on this occasion, however, is of too small amount to require any particular notice. It may, indeed, be more properly considered in the light of personality towards James Macpherson, and towards Scotland, than in that of legitimate reasoning.

Of late, however, a more formidable opponent of the antiquity of these

poems has appeared. Malcolm Laing, Esq. Advocate, and now Member of Parliament for the county of Orkney, has, in a Dissertation annexed to the second volume of his History of Scotland, endeavoured, by a formal and very elaborate series of arguments, to prove that this poetry is modern, and that it is the production of Mr James Macpherson. The arguments of Mr Laing appear to have made a very considerable impression upon the public mind; and many persons, probably, as well as himself, have considered some of them as *'unanswerable.*

Some years ago, the Highland Society of Scotland, with that liberality of research which has always interested it in every thing that concerns the honour and advantage of North Britain,



appointed a Committee of its number “to enquire into the Nature and Authenticity of the Poems of Ossian.” The Report of the Committee has appeared, drawn up by the elegant pen of Henry Mackenzie, Esq. its chairman. In this very interesting work, many important circumstances, relating to Celtic literature in general, and to the Poems of Ossian in particular, are brought forward, and placed in a luminous point of view. This is, indeed, what might have been expected from the learned and accomplished Author, assisted by able Celtic scholars and antiquarians, and favoured with an extensive correspondence, carried on by himself, and his associates of the Committee, throughout the Highlands.

The Committee, however, properly

regarding its own dignity, as the representative of the most illustrious public association of men that now exists in Britain, or perhaps in Europe, has chosen, on this occasion, to maintain a becoming reserve. Anxious only to collect facts, it has been little solicitous to offer opinions, or to enter into controversial discussion. The important facts, which it has collected, are laid before the public, and to these it is left to make their proper impression.

The Committee having thus declined to enter into the argument, it may be deemed presumptuous in an individual, favoured with far scantier means of information, to attempt to revive the controversy, or to pursue it to a greater length than has been already done. But it may be permitted to remark,

that though the Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland has, very properly, considered it as beneath its dignity to stoop to the refutation of the arguments of Mr Laing, it may not be improper for one, who has little to lose, and who may have the good fortune to gain some advantage in the discussion, to enter the lists even with this powerful antagonist.

It is proper, at the same time, to observe, that the object of the Committee has, unquestionably, been, in a very great measure, accomplished, by the vast body of valuable observations and facts which it has collected, and by the ample field which it has thus opened up for the speculations of those, who may be disposed to enter into the controversy. Of these import-

ant observations and facts, together with the conclusions which may be drawn from them, the Author of these pages will take the liberty, from time to time, to avail himself.

Without pretending to follow the formal and minute divisions of Mr Laing's Dissertation, it is proposed to consider, in the order in which they occur, those topics that may appear to relate more essentially to the antiquity and authenticity of this poetry; and, in this view, it would seem, that the subject will be exhausted, by taking into our account the following particulars; viz. The Period in which these Poems are said to have been composed—The State of Society and Manners, in the age in which Ossian is supposed to have flourished—The Mode

in which these Poems are represented to have been transmitted to us—And, finally, The Manner in which they have been collected, translated, and published, by Mr Macpherson. In this course of treating the subject, it is proposed to advert to the arguments advanced by Mr Laing, as they occur.

It is necessary to say, that the literary merits of these poems constitute no part of the argument, which it is proposed to discuss. Mr Laing may find in them “bombast, extravagant rants, and contemptible conceits.” An opportunity will occur of shewing, that, if such instances of false taste are to be found, they are to be imputed to the translator, and not to the original. But to vindicate the general merits of this poetry is foreign from the purpose

of this Essay. It may suffice to say, that it has been long admired, both at home and abroad, by persons whose taste and literature will not suffer by a comparison with those of any man whatsoever.

But, laying aside the consideration of the merits of these poems, if they are indeed as ancient as they are represented to be, they furnish, as Mr Hume has remarked, “one of the greatest curiosities, in all respects, that ever was discovered in the commonwealth of letters.”\* They evidently afford a fair promise of throwing much light on the early history and manners of an interesting people; and the few

\* See Mr Hume’s Letter on this subject to Dr Blair; Report of the Committee, p. 8.

remaining monuments of a language unmixed with any foreign idiom, a phenomenon not to be met with elsewhere, at this day, in Western Europe, seem to present an important subject of speculation to philosophic minds.

It is only necessary to add, that, in the few translations of passages cited from ancient authors, which it has been sometimes thought proper to give, fidelity to the original has been studied, more than elegance of expression.





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ESSAY  
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SECTION I.

*Of the Period in which these Poems were composed.—  
Connection with Roman History.—Carausius.—  
Caracalla.—Appellations of Places in Ossian's  
Poems.—Orkneys.—Carrickthura.*

THE period which has been generally assigned as the æra of Ossian, is the beginning of the third century. It is admitted, that this deduction can be made only from

the internal evidence of the poems which have been ascribed to him. In a case like this, we can expect no collateral evidence from the contemporary writers of Greece and Rome, to whom the language of the Caledonians was unknown, and by whom they themselves were accounted barbarous.

I am therefore disposed to consider, in the same light that Mr Laing does, the attempt which has been made, by Mr Macpherson, to connect these poems with the history of the Romans. What, indeed, can be more improbable, as Gibbon long ago remarked, than “ that the son of Severus, “ who, in the Caledonian war, was known “ only by the name of Antoninus, should be “ described, in these Poems, by a nickname “ invented four years afterwards, and scarcely “ used by the Romans, till after the death “ of the emperor.” I may add, that nothing can be more absurd than to suppose, that the inhabitants of Rome should bestow,



upon their emperor, a nickname of Celtic etymology.\* On Mr Macpherson's connection of this period with Roman history, by supposing Caros to have been the usurper Carausius, I lay equally little stress. But, because Mr Macpherson, the translator of these poems, has chosen to imagine such connections, does it follow, that the authenticity of Ossian must stand or fall with their fate? Because Mr Macpherson has thought it proper to identify the Balclutha of Ossian with the Alcluith of Bede, does it follow, that there was no Balclutha; and that there is no foundation for the interesting account of the adventures of Carthon?

It must be observed, however, that it is by no means a consequence of these admis-

\* Caracul, in Gaelic, signifies, "Of the Fierce Eye;" but we know, that the name of Caracallus, or Caracalla, was given, at Rome, to the emperor, on account of a garment of a particular form, and of a similar denomination, which he had introduced there.---See *Spartian, in Antonino Caracallo*, p. 159.

sions, that the events, related in the poems ascribed to Ossian, did not take place about the period which has been generally assigned; that is, whilst the Romans occupied that part of Caledonia which lies to the south of the wall of Antoninus. We have the authentic evidence of Roman history, and of Roman remains still existing, to prove, that, even in the time of Agricola, the northern and western Caledonians—the people to whom these poems relate, and amongst whom they are said to have been composed—were a numerous and warlike race of men; and that their incursions into the Roman province, in that, and during the succeeding periods of Roman domination, were frequent and formidable.

In the poems, accordingly, we find, as might have been expected, many express allusions to these encounters between the natives and the Roman invaders. But who was the hero “of the fierce eye;” or who

was “Caros king of ships,” we cannot hope to be able, at this distance of time, precisely to determine.

It may be remarked, that the very name of *Romans* does not once occur in these poems. As individuals are always denominated, by Ossian, from their personal qualities,—a practice common amongst all nations in the earlier stages of society,—so nations and countries, mountains and rivers, receive their appellations from the circumstances by which they are peculiarly distinguished. The Romans are, in these poems, called “the Strangers:” one country is denominated *Innis-uaine*, or, “the Green Isle;” and another *Erin*, or “the Western Isle:” a hill is denominated *Gormal*, or “the Blue Hill:” and a river, *Carun*, “the Winding Stream;” or *Balbha*, “the Silent.”

But, except in the few,—the very few instances, in which these places have retained

their ancient denomination, amidst the intermixture of tribes, and the shifting of possessions and interests, which have taken place, during the lapse of more than fourteen centuries, it is now almost impossible to determine what country, or mountain, or river, is spoken of in these poems. That *Erin* is Ireland; *Lochlin*, some part of Scandinavia; and *Morven*, (Mor-bheinn,) the mountainous part of Scotland, the proper kingdom of Fingal, we may indeed conclude with a degree of probability approaching to certainty.

Mr Laing, indeed, with his usual gratuitousness of assertion, observes, on this subject, “that Lochlin was a name unknown till the ninth century.”—That the Celtic appellation of a country, with which only the Celts had intercourse, should not have been adopted by Greek and Roman writers, is precisely what might have been expected. But, in refutation of Mr Laing’s assertion, it

fortunately happens, that we have a Gaelic manuscript, which Mr Astle has ascertained to have been *written* in the ninth or tenth century ; and which appears to have been *composed* between the fifth and eighth centuries, in which the name of Lochlin, as applied in these poems, frequently occurs. Of this valuable manuscript an interesting account is given, by Dr Donald Smith, in the Appendix to Mr Mackenzie's Report on the Poems of Ossian. Dr Smith observes also, that, in a Welsh treatise, written about the end of the seventh century, we read, " that " the warlike Irp conducted a fleet to *Llych-lyn*;" on which Mr Edward Llhuyd remarks, that, " by this name, we understand " Sweden, Denmark, and Norway."\*

\* To shew the fallacy of this mode of reasoning, from the circumstance, that the name of Lochlin does not occur in any author, with which Mr Laing is acquainted, I shall only mention, that, had the small, but valuable, treatise of Tacitus, *De Moribus Germanorum*, been lost, like many other ancient compositions, in the wreck of

Mr Laing also seems to lay much stress on his detection of Innis-tore, (in Dr Smith's collection, Innis-ore,) as the denomination of the Orkneys, to which Fingal is said to have made some noted expeditions. Mr Laing learns, from Solinus, that, in A. D. 240, "the Orkneys were altogether uninhabited." But, on what grounds he prefers, in this instance, the authority of Solinus to the unquestionable testimony of Tacitus, it is impossible to conjecture. That we may judge of Solinus's knowledge of the Orkney isles, it may be proper to observe, that he states their number to be *three*, instead of thirty, as given by Pomponius Mela; and forty, as given by Pliny. Solinus adds, that they were *uninhabited*. But Tacitus expressly informs us, that the fleet of his father-in-law, Agricola, in its circumnaviga-

time, the name of Englishmen (*Angli*) could not have been found, at this day, in any other author, prior to the period of Gregory the Great.

tion of Britain, "first discovered and *con-*  
*quered* the Orkneys." And, if Tacitus can  
 be credited in any thing, he surely must, in  
 this account of a transaction conducted by  
 so near a relative, and with whom, too, he  
 lived at Rome, for many years after, in ha-  
 bits of the most familiar intercourse. We  
 find Juvenal, about the same period, and in  
 allusion to the same event, speaking of the

—————*Modo* CAPTAS

*Orcadas, et minima contentos nocte Britannos.*

But is it to be supposed, that the historian  
 should relate, and the poet allude, to the  
*conquest* and *capture* of islands which had  
 no inhabitants? \*

It does not appear, then, that any mate-

\* Bæda indeed relates, (Histor. Eccles. ch. 3.) "that the Orkneys were added to the Roman empire, by Claudius, during his noted expedition to Britain. But what is the value of Bæda's authority, compared with the "*modo captas*" of Juvenal, and the "*incognitas ad id tempus Orcadas*" of Tacitus?

rial circumstance, in the Poems themselves, has a tendency to invalidate the opinion that they are to be referred to the period in which the Romans occupied Caledonia, and even to the commencement or middle of the third century. I speak only of the Poems; of Macpherson's dreams I make no account.

It is true, as has been said, that it is only from the internal evidence, furnished by the Poems themselves, that we can infer the period of their composition. But what other source of evidence could we, in this instance, expect? Could it be expected that Tacitus, or Herodian, or Dion Cassius, should inform us, that there existed, amongst the Caledonians, certain poems, of very superior merit, composed in the Celtic language, the preservation and transmission of which, to posterity, would well reward the labours of a Greek or Roman antiquary? No, surely. The contempt, in which the Greeks and



Romans had been accustomed to hold all other nations, whom they stigmatized with the epithet of *barbarous*, as an effectual bar to their favourable opinion; or even to a just appreciation or report of whatever merit they might possess, either in science or literature. Of all the writers of antiquity, Julius Cæsar seems to have displayed the greatest candour, and the fairest spirit of liberality, in giving an account of the nations esteemed *barbarous*; an eminent instance of which we have, in the view which he has given us, of the high attainments which the ancient philosophers of Britain had made, in different departments of science.\*

I am sufficiently aware, that, until the antiquity and authenticity of these Poems can be previously established, no argument can be drawn from the internal evidence which they afford, concerning the period in

\* See *Cæs. de Bell. Gall.* lib. vi. c. 14.

which they were composed. But the extent of my inference is limited accordingly. I would only infer, that nothing has been adduced from ancient history, or even from the Poems themselves, which can be fairly considered as contradictory to the position, that they belong to the period, which has been assigned: and, still further, I would argue, that, if it can be proved, from other considerations, that these Poems are really ancient, this, and no other, is the period, to which they are to be referred.

It is in this view of the subject, that I think it almost unnecessary to advert to the proofs of their spuriousness adduced, by Mr Laing, from the history of the middle ages. In the name of Fingal's friend, *Cathula*, Mr Laing "easily discerns" *Ketil*, the son of Biarno, who lived in the beginning of the tenth century. But, in order to assist his readers in "discerning" this, he informs them, that *Cathula* must be pronounced

*Cat-huil.* Mr Laing, in this, as well as in many other articles of Gaelic erudition, has been misled. He must suffer himself to be informed, that *Cathula* is pronounced, in the Gaelic, *Ca-huil*, and signifies, “the Eye of Battle.” An objection, of seemingly greater consequence, is drawn from Ossian’s assigning a name of Celtic etymology (*Carrick-thura*) to the palace of the king of the Orkneys, “where, at this day,” he adds, “all the names of places are Norwegian or Gothic.” But, it may be asked, whether the inhabitants of these isles were Goths, and their language the Gothic, in the second and third centuries? or, if they were, is it not most probable, that the names, by which places and persons, in the Orkneys, were designated by the Caledonians, were of Celtic origin; and imposed, by the Caledonians, according to the distinctive characters of the places or persons, in the usual

manner of early nations, and of early times? In the writings of the ancients of Greece and Rome, we know, that nothing was more common than to denominate places and persons, not by the names given them in their own country or language, but by names constructed according to the genius of the language into which they were transferred. Thus, Ctesias, a Greek, in his Assyrian history,—borrowed from records, which he found in the court of Persia,—uniformly gives to the kings, not their Assyrian names, which he found in the record, but names of Greek etymology, which he considered as of similar import. Diodorus Siculus, in his account of Egypt, gives to the heroes of that country, not their Egyptian names, but Greek names, which he considered as bearing the same signification. This practice, so common amongst ancient writers, seems to arise naturally

from that state of society, in which denominations are given to individuals, which are designed to be descriptive of their peculiar qualities.

## SECTION II.

*Of the State of Society in the Ages in which Fingal and Ossian are supposed to have flourished.—Estimate of the Character and Manners of the Caledonians, by Dion Cassius, Herodian, Tacitus, Ælian, &c.—Druidical Institutions.—Silence concerning Religion.—Domestic circumstances.*

THE Greeks and Romans, in the pride of superior civilization, bestowed the epithet of *barbarous* on all other nations. It is no wonder, then, that the Caledonians, a people still in the first stages of society, were subjected to that appellation. Yet, before we proceed, let us endeavour to form a fair estimate of what is reported of their character and manners, by the most respectable authors of Greece and Rome.

Of all the ancients, who have given us an account of the manners of our Caledonian ancestors, Dion Cassius and Herodian have drawn the most unfavourable pictures. Yet what is the amount of all that Dion advances? He tells us, “ that the country is rugged and bleak; that the inhabitants subsist chiefly by hunting, and pasturage, and on fruits; that they are addicted to plunder; that they fight from cars; that their infantry is firm in action, and rapid, either in pursuit or flight; that their arms are a shield, a dart, and a dagger, with a ball of metal at the point to astonish the enemy with the sound, when it is brandished.”\* Dion farther bears witness to their hardness in enduring hunger, and fatigue, and cold.

\* Tacitus, a far more respectable authority, in point of acuteness, as well as opportunity of information, tells us, that they wore *very large swords, (ingentes gladii.)*---*Agric. c. 36.*

He adds, “ that they have their women in  
“ common.”

Now, I confess, that, in all this testimony, if we except the last circumstance, which Mr Laing himself candidly rejects, I can perceive nothing but that ordinary admixture of violence and of bravery, of ferocity and of generosity, which constitutes the character of nations, in the earlier stages of society.

The testimony of Herodian is very nearly the same, to the character of hardiness, and intrepidity in swimming and wading over their rivers and morasses, without regard to the inclemencies of the weather,—exertions, on which the Romans prided themselves in the polished days of Horace:—he adds the common account of their painting their bodies; and of their propensity to war and shedding of blood. Jerome, an eye-witness, is cited, as asserting, that the *Attacotti*, (who, however, by the consent of all, did not inhabit Caledonia, in the period assigned to Fin-



gal,) were addicted to eating human flesh. This also Mr Laing very candidly rejects.

Such is the amount of the testimony of those ancient writers, concerning the barbarism of the Caledonians. But why did Mr Laing, in elaborating this point, throw the unquestionable authority of Tacitus into the shade? For I must, in this instance, as before, call his authority unquestionable; because he enjoyed the best opportunities of being informed. His father-in-law, Agricola, had been, during the space of about seven years, commander of the Roman forces in Britain; he had penetrated farther into Caledonia than any that had preceded him; and, after his return to Rome, his son-in-law lived with him, for many years, in habits of the utmost confidence and intimacy.

In speaking of the Britons in general, Tacitus furnishes us with an instance of civilization, which is commonly, and most justly, esteemed the criterion of polished so-

ciety; namely, the high respect which was paid to the female character; the distinguished rank assigned to the women; and the value, in which their opinion was held, in the most important transactions. He tells us, “that the Britons were wont to “make war under the conduct of females; “and that they placed their wives near the “field of battle, that they might witness the “successes of their husbands.”\* To assign a high importance to females, seems, indeed, to be a common feature in the character of a people, in the earlier stages of society; and it appears not a little singular, that nations revert to this same sentiment, in their most polished periods. Tacitus says, “that the Germans thought, that there re- “sided in females, something sacred and “prescient; they neither reject,” says he, “their counsels, nor neglect their responses.”

\* Tac. Ann. lib. xiv. c. 34. 35.; De Mor. Germ. c. 8.; and Cæs. Bell. Gall. lib. i. c. 51.

This, too, is a distinguishing feature in the manners described by Ossian; and, to those who have not attended to this remarkable trait in the history of the Celts, it has furnished an argument against the authenticity of these poems. It is certain, that, though the chief elegancies of life, and the most refined charms of modern society, have arisen from the influence of female character and manners, this refinement was altogether unknown to the Greeks and Romans, in their most polished times. In this respect, they were, according to every feeling of modern times, themselves barbarians! It is humiliating to the nature of man to reflect, that their highest attainments, in the elegancies of life, consisted in increasing the modes of luxury, and in multiplying the resources of sensuality. In the high consideration, in which the female character was held amongst the Celts, on the other hand, we are furnished with a pleasing picture, which verifies its

genuineness, by the simplicity of its traits. It is a picture, which is exhibited, on all occasions, by Ossian; and so far is it from suggesting an argument of modern fabrication, that it evidently affords an internal character of truth, and an indelible impression of authenticity, stamped by the just representation of ancient Celtic manners.

In speaking of Caledonia particularly, Tacitus takes notice of ample states beyond the Forth;\* and bears honourable testimony to their skill in warlike operations. We find them, previous to the celebrated battle of the Grampians, with the wisest counsels, sending embassies to the surrounding states; forming alliances; and adopting every measure which prudence could suggest, or valour achieve, in order to repel the impending danger. Above thirty thousand armed men, “besides the daily accession of young men,

\* Tac. Agric. c. 25. *et seq.*

“and of aged heroes, famed in war,” assemble under Galgacus, whom, by common consent, according to the usual manner of the Celtic nations, they had chosen for their leader. Immediately before the battle, Galgacus addresses his soldiers, in a speech, full of good sense and knowledge of the respective interests of the contending parties; full of temperate valour and patriotic eloquence. Making every due allowance for the manner of the ancient writers, of framing speeches for the personages whom they introduce, it seems scarcely possible to suppose, that such a writer as Tacitus could, without some foundation in fact, put such a speech as this into the mouth of a mere savage.

The conduct of the battle, too, on the part of the Caledonians, evinces, notwithstanding their final defeat, very considerable judgment and military skill. Their masterly evolutions and undaunted bravery had, more than once, by the acknowledgment of the

historian, rendered the issue of the day doubtful. Such is the testimony of Tacitus; and I would ask, if this be the picture of “a nation of naked sanguinary barbarians, armed with a shield, a dart, and a dagger; almost destitute of iron, which they prized like gold; and living promiscuously in wattled booths?”\*

To the generosity and bravery of the Celts, of whom the Caledonians are unquestionably to be reckoned a branch, Ælian, who wrote about the period under our consideration, bears the most honourable witness:—“To this contempt of danger,” he adds, “they are prompted by songs, in honour of those who have bravely fallen, and by trophies and monuments dedicated to them, after the manner of the Greeks.”†

Aristotle, too, had, many centuries before, borne witness to the undaunted heroism of

\* See Laing's Dissertation, p. 395.

† Ælian Hist. Var. lib. xii. c. 23.

the Celts, which he even seems to reckon to have bordered on unwarrantable rashness:—"They fear," says he, "neither earthquakes, nor the waves of the sea."\* And Arrian testifies, that they said to Alexander, "that they were afraid of nothing, but lest the heavens should tumble down."

The truth seems to be, that we are not warranted, by any just principle of reasoning, in forming conclusions beforehand concerning the various shades of distinction, which, under different circumstances, may mark the manners of any particular nation, or period of society. In order to conclude justly, a previous or collateral acquaintance with the particular nation, or state of society, is indispensably necessary. With regard to China, for instance, unless we had the indubitable evidence of historians and travellers, how difficult would it be to con-

\* Arist. Eth. lib. iii. c. 7.

ceive, that, for more than two thousand years, the state of society, of arts, of science, and of agriculture, has been stationary; whilst, in every other nation of the earth, these circumstances have undergone innumerable and incalculable changes? Who could predicate of the sequestered inhabitants of the Pelew islands all the gentleness and humanity of European manners? or of the Otaheitans, the dissipation of the latter ages of Rome, joined to the mildness and docility of the most polished people of modern times?

On this ground, it would seem, that we are not warranted to attribute absolute barbarism to our Caledonian ancestors, merely from the consideration of the country and period in which they lived, and the state of society in some contemporary nations. We should allow its just weight to every scattered hint furnished by writers of undoubted credit; and to every accidental circum-



stance which may have had any influence in characterising the manners and condition of the people.

Though the Caledonians had not, at this period, arrived at those refinements, which distinguish the commercial, or even the agricultural state of society, yet it appears, from the testimony of the authors who have been cited, that their population was very considerable; that they were well versed in the art of war; that they possessed a high generosity of mind; and that they placed their chief glory in independence.

We know, that the mode of living, the domestic accommodations, and even the external scenery, which daily strikes the eye, have a powerful influence in forming the character, and in giving a tone to the ideas of a people. Even in the Highlanders of the present day, whose characters have not undergone a change by the contact of foreign manners, we may still trace the

mode of thinking and of acting, which distinguishes the personages of Ossian. Accustomed to traverse vast tracts of country, which have never been subjected to the hand of art; contemplating, every day, the most diversified scenery; surrounded everywhere by wild and magnificent objects; by mountains, and lakes, and forests, the mind of the Highlander is expanded, and partakes, in some measure, of the rude sublimity of the objects with which he is conversant. Pursuing the chase, in regions not peopled according to their extent, he often finds himself alone in the gloomy desert, or by the margin of the dark frowning deep; his imagination, tinged with pleasing melancholy, finds society in the passing breeze, and he beholds the airy forms of his fathers descending on the skirts of the cloud. When the tempest howls over the heath, and the elements are mixed in dire uproar, he recognizes the angry spirit of the storm, and he re-

tires to his secret cave. Such is, at this day, the tone of mind which characterizes the Highlander, who has not lost the distinctive marks of his race by commerce with strangers; and such, too, is the picture which has been drawn by Ossian.

Nor need we be altogether surprised at the sublimity of sentiment, and generosity of manners, which are ascribed to his personages by Ossian, if we take into account some peculiar institutions, which we may conclude, upon the best grounds, to have existed, in Caledonia, at a still earlier period. The principal of these was, that of the *Druidical order*, together with its appendage, that of the *Bards*; and if, soon after the period of Ossian, his countrymen did sink into deep barbarism, it is chiefly to the abolition of that illustrious hierarchy, that this striking change must be attributed.\*

\* Aware that the existence of the druidical order in

The Druids, according to the universal testimony of antiquity, were highly distinguished by their attainments in every department of the most valuable science. They taught, as we are informed by the unquestionable testimony of Julius Cæsar,† the immortality of the soul;—in common with the Magi of the East, from whom, it is probable, as Pliny insinuates,‡ that they derived their philosophy, they held the doctrine of transmigration; they taught the science of the stars, and of their motions; they instructed the youth, that resorted to them, in physics, or concerning the general nature of things; and, ascending to the mysteries of theology, they taught the doctrine of the immortal Gods. Strabo (lib. iv.) informs us, to the same purpose, that the Druids taught

Scotland has been denied by some, I reserve the *proofs* of their establishment there for a separate dissertation.

† Cæs. Bell. Gall. lib. vi. c. 14. 15.

‡ Hist. Nat. lib. xxx. c. 4. and Pomp. Mela, lib. iii. c. 1.

the immortality of the soul:—"Ἀφθαρτας τας  
ψυχας λεγουσι." And Lucan says,

—————*Vobis auctoribus umbræ*  
*Non tacitas Erebi sedes, ditisque profundi*  
*Pallida regna petunt; regit enim spiritus artus,*  
*Orbe alio longæ, canitis si cognita, vitæ.*

Pomponius Mela (lib. iii.) informs us, "that  
" the Druids profess to know the magnitude  
" and form of the earth and of the world,  
" the motions of the heaven and of the stars,  
" and the will of the gods."

In these sublime and important studies, the disciples of the Druids spent sometimes no less than the space of twenty years. All their science and history were committed to memory alone. Though the art of writing was known amongst them, it was held unlawful to commit their doctrines to writing. Cæsar accordingly adds, that it was usual, for the disciples of the Druids, to commit a vast number of verses, in which, no

doubt, their science was contained, to memory.

We have here, it must be acknowledged, a very respectable view afforded us of the philosophy of the Druids, by an author, whom all will allow to have been a competent judge.

Though this hierarchy had been exterminated in Caledonia, according to tradition, somewhat prior to the period of Ossian, and, in England, according to Tacitus, somewhat earlier still, yet so recently had their catastrophe taken place, that Ossian might have had a full opportunity of acquiring the knowledge which they taught; or, at least, that portion of it which was usually communicated to the bards. Persons of the highest rank accounted it honourable to be initiated in the mysteries of the Druids.\*

\* *Docent multa nobilissimos gentis, clam et diu, vicenis annis, in specu et abditis saltibus.*---Pompon. Mela. lib. iii. c. 1.

Cicero\* informs us, that Divitiacus, the Æduan, with whom he was personally acquainted, was of this order; and that, from his knowledge of nature, “partly by auguries, and partly by conjecture, he said, “that he could foretel what was to happen.”† It can scarcely be doubted, that the son of Fingal took occasion to imbibe some portion of this knowledge, and to improve his sublime genius, by all the acquisitions that were within his reach.

Of the occasion and manner of the overthrow of the Druidical order in Scotland, we can expect no account from the writers of Greece and Rome, as it was a domestic transaction, with which the Romans had no concern; and it is surely worthy of remark,

\* Cic. de Divinatione, lib. 1.

† “They instruct,” says Pomponius Mela, (lib. iii. c. 1.) “persons of the highest rank, in secret, and for a long time,---during twenty years,---in caves, and retired recesses.”

that, had not the destruction of the Druids in Anglesea been particularly connected with the operations of the Roman army under Ostorius, it is probable, that we should have had no evidence from Tacitus, at least, that this order had ever existed in England.

The account of the overthrow of the Druidical hierarchy, which is handed down by tradition, is, at least, far from being improbable; viz. That the princes of the Fingalian dynasty, who had been originally elected to the supremacy, according to the manner of the Celtic nations, only for the impending occasion, feeling themselves, at length, firmly established in their power, refused to resign it, as had always hitherto been done, to the Druids; and that, in the struggle, the Druids fell, and were finally extirpated.

Here it may not be improper to remark, that, in two poems, published by Dr Smith in his collection, one entitled, “Dargo, the Son of the Druid of Bel,” and the other,



“Conn, the Son of Dargo,” (which, if not the most poetical, are surely, of the whole collection, the most interesting in a historical view,) we have a particular, and very striking account of the progress and issue of the contest between the Druids and the house of Fingal.

Here, then, we find, in Celtic Caledonia, an illustrious order of sages, who, during a long period, had poured a stream of light on these northern lands. Happily, before it was extinguished, the transcendent genius of Ullin and Ossian, of Alpin and Carril, had caught the irradiation of its departing splendour. They had imbibed, even from its declining lustre, a refinement of ideas, an elevation of sentiment, and an elegance of poetical composition, which we still admire, but which, when we take into account the discipline in which they were initiated, should not excite our surprise. Those celebrated men have left behind them a mass of

poetry, to which a succession of bards, extending through more than fourteen centuries, have been able to add nothing;—but, conscious of their immense inferiority, have satisfied themselves, during the darkness which ensued, with committing to memory, and reciting, the productions of happier times.

This æra, so illustrious in poetry and in arms, is termed, in Highland tradition,—current at this day,—“*An Fheine*,” an expression which it is difficult to render into any other language, without a periphrasis. It, for the most part, signifies the Fingallian race, or that dynasty of heroes, which begins with *Trenmor* and ends with *Ossian*. It sometimes denominates the period of time, during which that dynasty subsisted; and, sometimes, the whole race of men, who lived during that period.

Mr Laing’s grand argument, against the antiquity and authenticity of these Poems,

is founded on the utter improbability, that such a period of refinement, as this, existed amongst the Caledonians, previously to that barbarism, into which they have been found, a few centuries afterwards, to have sunk. This argument is detailed, in the first volume of his History of Scotland, (p. 44.) and, in the opening of his Dissertation, it is pronounced by him to be *unanswerable*.

But, I may be permitted to ask, whether the history of nations is not full of similar instances of change in the condition of society? Let us look back, for a moment, to ancient Egypt, the cradle of the sciences; and the stupendous monuments of whose progress in philosophy, and in the arts, have bid defiance to the depredations of time, and of the elements. Do we not there behold a people passing from the height of refinement to the most sordid ignorance, and to the lowest degrees of barbarism? From Egypt, let us turn our eyes to Greece, the

favourite seat of the Muses, the country of Hesiod, of Homer, and of Sappho. We see the modern Greeks the prey of Turkish insolence, and of the most abject ignorance.

It is true, that none of those disastrous reverses have been brought about without a cause that can be easily assigned. Egypt and Greece have been desolated by foreign invasion; and, though Caledonia has remained at all times inviolated by a foreign foe, may not her relapse into barbarism be sufficiently accounted for, by the destruction of that order of philosophers, which had formerly enlightened her, and by the extinction of the illustrious house of Fingal, by which she was left a prey, for many subsequent ages, to the anarchical rivalship of chieftains of inferior note?

With regard to the silence, which has been alleged to prevail, in these Poems, on the subject of religious sentiment, it is pre-

sumed that the estimate has not been fairly made. There is certainly to be found, in Ossian, a mythology which possesses much interest and beauty: it is of a peculiar kind indeed, but sufficiently marked, and apparently very natural, for a people in the earlier stages of society to have formed. It appears, from innumerable passages in Ossian, that it was the general opinion of his countrymen, that their ancestors existed in a disembodied state; that they dwelt in the airy halls of the clouds; that they continued still to interest themselves in the conduct and fortunes of their offspring; that they possessed a prescience of future events, of which they sometimes gave intimations to their living relatives; and, finally, that they possessed certain influences over the elements, as well as over the affairs of mortals. I am obligingly permitted, by my respected friend, Professor Richardson, of Glasgow college, to subjoin an elegant and philoso-

phical deduction of the Ossianic mythology, which was written by him, at an early period, after the first publication of Mr Macpherson's translations.\*

It is certain, that a sense of religion, and a reverence for superior powers, who are supposed to influence the fortunes and happiness of men, is natural to the human mind, and has been found, in some degree, and under various modifications, to prevail in every state of human society. In some nations, the influence of this principle has been greater, and in others less. Amongst the Celts, it appears, from the passages cited from Aristotle and from Arrian, that the reverence entertained for superior powers was slight; and we are furnished by travellers with similar traits of nations placed in similar circumstances of society. Mr Weld, in his Travels in North America,† tells us,

\* See Appendix, No. II.

† Weld's Travels, vol. ii. p. 236.

“ that some tribes of the Indians have more  
“ devotion than others; and that the Shaw-  
“ anese, in particular, have little fear of evil  
“ spirits.” Mr Barrow, in his Travels in  
South Africa, furnishes us with various in-  
stances of similar sentiment.

Still, however, it might have been expect-  
ed, that, amongst the Caledonians, accus-  
tomed for so many ages to the Druidical in-  
stitutions, in which superstitious obser-  
vances, and sacrifices to the gods, bore so  
conspicuous a part, many traces of the an-  
cient and national religion might be met  
with, even in the days of Ossian. That  
we have, in these Poems, abundant allusions  
to the peculiar mythology of the Caledo-  
nians, has been already remarked. And,  
with regard to the total silence which pre-  
vails, in these Poems, concerning the higher  
mysteries of the Druids, it would seem, that  
it is a circumstance which might have been  
expected, and which may be easily explained.

We are informed, by the most respectable writers of antiquity, that the Celtic hierarchy was divided into several classes, to each of which its own particular department was assigned.\* The *Druids*, by the consent of all, constituted the highest class; the *Bards* seem to have been the next in rank; and the *Eubages* the lowest. Without entering, at present, into any discussion concerning the particular departments of those several classes, it is sufficient to remark, that, according to Ammianus, the higher mysteries of religion, and probably, also, the science of the occult powers of nature, which they had discovered, constituted the department of the Druids. To the Bards, again, it is allowed by all, were committed the celebration of the heroic achievements

\* Strabo, lib. 4. Ammianus Marcellinus, lib. 15. The former distinguishes these orders by the titles of "Bards, Vates, and Druids;" the latter, by those of "Druids, Bards, and Eubages."



of their warriors, and the public record of the history of the nation.

But we know, that in every polity, which depends upon mystery, as that of the Druids undoubtedly did, the inferior orders are sedulously prevented from encroaching upon the pale of those immediately above them, by the mysteries which constitute their peculiar badge. To be admitted to these, a certain period of probation, and specific forms of initiation, are indispensibly requisite. Cæsar expressly informs us, that the Druids excluded the lower orders from the knowledge of their institutions; and we can have no doubt, that their own disciples had those mysteries communicated to them only according to the rank which they had attained, and the degree to which they had been admitted.

The Druids, as has been said, possessed, exclusively, the higher mysteries of religion. The Bards, the order next in dignity, had a

different department assigned to them. Is it not probable, then, that the latter were expressly prohibited from encroaching upon the province of their superiors, by intermingling religion, if they had any knowledge of its mysteries, which it is likely they had not, with the secular subjects of their song ?

Thus, then, we seem warranted to conclude upon this subject:—By the time that Ossian flourished, the higher order of this hierarchy had been destroyed; and, in all probability, the peculiar mysteries which they taught had perished along with them: and, even if any traces of them remained, such is the force of habit, and the veneration which men entertain for the institutions in which they have been educated, that it is no wonder that the bards religiously forbore to tread on ground, from which they had, at all times, by the most awful sanctions, been excluded.

In this view of the subject, it would seem, that the silence which prevails in these Poems, with regard to the higher mysteries of religion, instead of furnishing an argument against their authenticity, affords a strong presumption of their having been composed at the very time, in the very circumstances, and by the very persons to whom they have been attributed. Indeed, had there been any account given, in these Poems, of the secret rites, and horrid immolations, of the *Beltein* and of the *Samhin*,\* there might have been some ground to question their authenticity; and to have ascribed them to a modern, who, though versed in these still prevalent

\* The *Beltein* is "the fire of *Belis*, or the Sun," kindled on the first of May, and still retained as the name of that season. The *Samhin* is "the Fire of Peace," still celebrated in the Highlands, and other parts of Scotland, on Hallow-eve, by kindling fires on the tops of hills, and by many other superstitious rites, which are evidently to be considered as reliques of Druidism.---See Appendix.

superstitions, had not judgment to discern the line by which the sacred ceremonies of the Druids were separated and concealed from vulgar observation.

Mr Laing remarks,\* “ that, from the genuine Ossian, we should obtain, if not an accurate delineation of the characters of his contemporaries, at least some insight into the domestic manners and occupations of the early Caledonians; but here,” says he, “ we have only the ideal manners of romance, the insipid outlines of perfect sentimental heroes.”

It is foreign, as I have observed before, from my purpose, to offer any thing concerning the merit or demerit of these compositions. They are before the public; and the public appreciation of their value will not probably be much affected by Mr Laing’s opinion or mine. Dr Blair pronounces Os-

\* Dissertation, p. 398.

sian superior to Virgil,—whose heroes, it must be allowed, are insipid enough,—in the delineation of character. In the characters of Cuchullin, of Connal, and of Calmar, and especially in those of Fingal, Cathmor, Cairbar, and Connan, one should think that the traits are drawn with a distinctness, as well as boldness of pencil, sufficient to satisfy the most fastidious critic.

With regard to the inferiority of Ossian to Homer, in the delineation of domestic manners and arts, whilst I join most readily in yielding the palm to the great Father of Poetry, I may be permitted to remark, that the object of Homer's poetry was very different from that of the Caledonian bard. Homer lived more than a century and a half after the events which he celebrates. His object, both in the Iliad and the Odyssey, was to compose a work addressed to the imagination. In the former, adopting the basis of his facts from a history, which was repu-

ted real, he embellishes these facts by every species of fiction, and hesitates not to call in to his aid every sort of supernatural machinery. In the *Odyssey*, again, he makes the supposed wanderings of his hero the vehicle for a surprising tissue of adventures, and for a pleasing description of the manners and customs of various nations. In a plan like this, there was ample room for every species of embellishment, and the introduction of every image, that is calculated to please, might justly be expected.

But the object of the Celtic bard, upon the other hand, was to relate, in verse indeed, or in a measured diction, for the ease of the memory, subjects of true history. He was limited, by his office, to the celebration of illustrious events, and the transactions of illustrious persons, chiefly his own contemporaries; but, to the detail of domestic events and characters, he could as seldom descend as Thucydides or Livy. He was not preclu-

ded, indeed, from the graces of poetry, but these must be employed only to adorn real events and characters, or to embellish the descriptions of external nature. Fictitious circumstances were altogether denied to him. The bard was, in fact, more properly a *historian* than a *poet*. The occurrences of ordinary life, however well adapted to certain kinds of poetical composition, belonged not to his department.

Still, however, it may be remarked, that these Poems occasionally furnish many interesting views of the manners and mode of living which prevailed in that period of society, to which they relate. It would be amusing, and perhaps instructive, to collect those scattered traits, and to form from them a more precise picture of the state of society, in those ages, than has hitherto been exhibited. This, however, cannot be advantageously done till the whole of the originals are before the public. The translations, even

of Mr Macpherson, as shall be shewn, are not to be relied on.

Under the head of "Manners and Customs," Mr Laing (with what propriety is not very obvious) urges some strange topics of detection, which it will not be difficult to refute.

He remarks, that the aspin, or trembling poplar, the *crithean*, or *cran na crith*, of the Celts, so often mentioned in these Poems, is a foreign tree, and not a native of Scotland. Here it appears, that the learned gentleman has chosen to occupy ground to which he is a stranger. It is a point sufficiently established amongst naturalists, that the *populus tremula*, or aspin, is indigenous to Scotland; I can point it out, in the utmost profusion, in the Highlands, growing on the margin of lakes, and in the crevices of rocks. Were it worth while, on a point so undeniable, I could cite the authority of one of the first names in natural history, to



whom I shewed it last season, growing in abundance on the shores of Loch-Ketturin, in Perthshire.

With equal gratuitousness, the yew-tree, the *iubhar*, or *iu'ar* of the Highlanders, is asserted to be "certainly not indigenous." But it is certain, I must affirm, that the yew-tree has always been, and still is, a native of Scotland. Lightfoot, in his *Flora Scotica*, holds it to be such, on the authority of Dr Stuart of Luss, the first name, at this day, in the science of the plants of his native Highlands. There are innumerable places in Scotland, which still have their denomination from this tree, according to the ordinary use of giving names to places, from the species of trees with which they chiefly abound;—thus, *Glen-iu'ir*, "the Glen of Yews;" *Dunure*, or *Dun-iu'ir*, "the Hill of Yews," &c. Giraldus Cambrensis \* in-

\* Giraldus, Topographia Hiberniæ, pars i. c. 5.

forms us, that the yew-tree grew in such abundance in Ireland, that the scarcity of bees, in that country, is, in part, to be ascribed to this cause. But, if it abounded in Ireland, how can it be denied to Scotland, so nearly of the same soil and climate? Notwithstanding the general attempts to extirpate it, on account of its noxious qualities, it still grows in some parts of Scotland.

Of the legitimacy of Mr Laing's argument, drawn from the silence of Ossian concerning certain productions and animals which must have existed in Scotland, in his days, I entertain considerable doubt. The mention of the wild boar, it is observed, occurs *only once* in Macpherson's translation. But what, I would ask, can be inferred from this circumstance? Might not the authenticity of the poems ascribed to Virgil be questioned, on the same ground, who, though his ten Eclogues relate exclusively to shepherds and flocks, and his Georgics to pasto-

ral and agricultural economy, makes mention of the fox *only once*, in the whole compass of his poems? \* In the *Seandana*, a collection of Gaelic poems published by Dr Smith, which, notwithstanding many inequalities, and innumerable interpolations, contains much poetry, which is undoubtedly ancient, and of very high merit, we meet with frequent mention of the wolf: † and the whole of the poem of Diarmid, in that collection, relates to the hunting of the wild boar.

As to the charge of the absence of all sort of allusion to *frost* in these Poems, without taking advantage of the observation of Tacitus, concerning the mildness of the climate, ‡ I must say, that it is totally unfound-

\* Virg. Ecl. iii. v. 91.

† See Finnan and Lorma, and Conn, p. 252. It is singular, that Dr Smith apologizes (Gaelic Antiq. p. 210.) for the omission of all mention of the wolf, though it occurs in the poems given by himself.

‡ Tac. Agr. c. 12. "*Asperitas frigorum abest.*"

ed. The opening of the eighth book of *Temora* furnishes a magnificent image, derived from *frost*; and, in Dr Smith's Collection, we have innumerable allusions to the same object, though, even in his own translation, these are sometimes, according to his usual manner, mutilated and lost.\* The singular circumstances, in which we are placed, with respect to the originals of Macpherson's Collection, render it impossible, at present,

\* See *Seandana*, pages 73. 82. 84. 103, &c. It is, indeed, very singular, that, exclusive of the simile derived from frost, in the eighth book of *Temora*, now alluded to, the learned gentleman himself, in the course of his Dissertation, has cited *two other* passages, alluding to the same phenomenon. The one is, Ossian's comparison of Swaran "to a rock of ice." The other is his comparison of the heroes, upon a certain occasion, to "oaks with all their branches round them, when they echo to the stream of frost." All this shews a very strange inaccuracy of criticism. That Mr Laing should assert, that only "a *single* image, in *Fingal*, is derived "from frost," whilst he himself has furnished *two*, may serve to shew what we are to expect in the sequel of his detections.

to ascertain precisely what images and allusions they contain, and what are wanting in them. Till the originals are brought forward, we must trust to the skill or integrity of the translators.

## SECTION III.

*Of the Mode in which these Poems have been preserved, and transmitted to us, through so many Ages.*

THAT such a mass of poetry, as has been presented to the public by Mr Macpherson, together with what may be reckoned ancient and genuine, in Dr Smith's collection, should have been preserved amongst a rude people, and transmitted by oral tradition, through a period of more than fifteen centuries, with any degree of purity, is, it must be acknowledged, a phenomenon, of which we have no example in the history of literature. It can be accounted for only, by remarking, that we have no example, in the history of Europe, of a people placed in similar circumstances,

and possessed of institutions similar to those of the Caledonians.

To elucidate this subject, it is necessary to advert to *two* distinguishing circumstances, which mark the situation of the Caledonians, during the period that elapsed, from the time in which these Poems were composed, till that in which they were collected and translated by Mr Macpherson:—The first is, That they remained, during that period, unconquered, and consequently unmixed with any other people:—the other is, That, in consequence of this permanency of political situation, their language remained unaltered and unmixed with any foreign idiom. Let us attend to these two circumstances separately.

## PART I.

*The political Situation of Caledonia, during the last fifteen Centuries.—The Dominion and Influence of the Celts.—The supposed Invasion of Riada.—The Bardic Order.—Transmission of the Poetry of Homer.—Recitations of ancient Gaelic Poetry, by Persons still, or very lately, alive.*

IT has been the opinion of the most celebrated writers, on historical antiquities, that a race of men, of the same stock, and speaking the same language, originally occupied Spain, Gaul, the British isles, and even Illyricum, and a part of Germany.\* This people are denominated *Celts* by the Greek and Roman writers, and the language which

\* Cluverius, *Introduct. Geograph.* Edit. Lond. 1711, pages 52. 76. 123. 234.



they spoke, the *Celtic*. This common origin and common language may still be traced, especially in Spain, Gaul, and Britain, in the names of tribes, provinces, cities, mountains, and rivers, which are undeniably of Celtic origin.

It appears, from Pliny, Tacitus, and other writers of antiquity, that there existed, at the same time, in the north of Europe, a numerous and warlike race of men, called *Teutones* and *Gothones*, who are represented as having a different origin, and speaking a different language, from the Celts. It appears from the testimony of Cæsar, that, even in his time, this last race of people were continually advancing to the westward, and encroaching on the territories of the Celts. The Belgæ, one of their most powerful tribes, had crossed the Rhine, and, even then, occupied a part of Gaul. Tacitus records the opinion, that this race had passed

over, at an early period, into Britain, and occupied the eastern parts of this island; and Cæsar appears to have entertained the same belief.

By the inundations of these northern tribes, the Celtic nations, the original occupiers of western Europe, were gradually compelled to retire towards the shores of the Atlantic: and we see, at this moment, the whole remains, of that once powerful race, cooped up in a few narrow districts of western Europe, which, either from their natural poverty, or inaccessibility, escaped the ravages of the conquerors. In Wales, in the Isle of Man, in the Highlands of Scotland, in some parts of Ireland, and in Lower Brittany, in France, are now to be found the only remains of Celtic blood, and language, and manners.

Without engaging in an elaborate discussion, concerning the history of the Celts, it

will probably be admitted, that, of the above districts, the Highlands of Scotland have enjoyed, in every period, an exemption from foreign conquest and intermixture, and have consequently retained the Celtic character without deterioration. This is, indeed, admitted, by Mr Laing.\* It must be acknowledged to be a singular instance, in the history of Europe, that a people should remain, during so many ages, unshaken and undisturbed by foreign invasion;—and that they should have preserved, to this day, the language and manners of their forefathers, with little variation, is a phenomenon, in the history of the human race, which promises to afford an interesting subject of speculation to philosophic minds.

That the Highlands of Scotland, however, have remained, at all times, entirely exempt from foreign invasion and intermixture, must

\* Hist. of Scotland, vol. i. p. 45.

be understood with a few slight limitations. The Romans, we know, penetrated, under Agricola, beyond the Tay. During their stay in Britain, their intercourse with the Highlanders, whether of a friendly or hostile nature, must have been not infrequent; and this must have produced some influence, at least, on the language and habits of the adjacent tribes. The Danes, too, during the subsequent ages, frequently invaded the western and northern parts of Scotland, and sometimes even formed temporary settlements. To them, no doubt, many names and terms of Teutonic origin may be traced; some of these are actually found to exist, and just where they might have been naturally expected, in the western Isles, and in the north of Scotland.

There is one part of Mr Laing's argument, on this subject, which demands more particular attention. He asserts, "that there is "not now, in Scotland, a Highlander of the

“ race that existed at the beginning of the  
“ æra ascribed to Fingal.”\*

Being now here, as we are at this day, it is of very little importance to determine from what stock we had our origin; but it is of most essential consequence to the faith of evidence, and to the truth of history, to examine the ground, on which Mr Laing has advanced such an unwarranted position. He states, on the authority of Bæda, that, in A. D. 258, Scotland was invaded by Riada, an Irish chieftain; and that a kingdom was founded by him, in the Highlands, called, after his name, the Dalriadan kingdom; and hence he concludes, that all the present inhabitants are of the race of the invaders.

We have Bæda before us; and, without any pretension to antiquarian lore, I shall only beg leave to state plainly all that he

\* Page 378. note.

advances on this subject, leaving it to the reader to judge concerning the foundation of Mr Laing's position.

I would remark, then, that all that relates to the invasion of Scotland, by Riada, is to be found in a single sentence in the first chapter of Bæda's Ecclesiastical History of England, of which I shall now give an account.\* After narrating, what is very important to our present purpose, and which shall afterwards be adduced, "that the  
 " *Brittones*, from Aremorican Gaul, first occupied the southern parts of Britain, to  
 " which," he adds, "they gave their name," he informs us, "that a race of Picts, of  
 " Scythian origin, in attempting to reach  
 " Britain, were driven, by the force of weather, into the north of Ireland; that the  
 " *Scotti*,† then inhabiting that part of Ire-

\* I use the edition of Bæda published at Cambridge, in 1722, *cum notis Joannis Smith, S. T. P.*

† With regard to the name *Scotti*, which appears to

“ land, refused them admission; but gave  
 “ them this salutary advice:—‘ We know,’  
 “ said they, ‘ an island, at no great distance,  
 “ towards the east; there you may find set-  
 “ tlements, and, if you are opposed, we shall  
 “ assist you.”

In the paragraph which immediately follows, we have the sentence which appears to be the sole foundation of the alleged invasion of Riada; the Dalriadan kingdom; and the Irish origin of all the present inhabitants

have been given by early writers, as well to the inhabitants of Ireland as to those of Scotland, with whom it has become permanent; the learned Joseph Scaliger, in his notes on the Chronicon of Eusebius, (p. 175.) has well observed, “ that it is not properly a name, but an appellation, descriptive of the wandering and predatory manner of life which characterised those tribes, who, by their incursions, infested the Roman province in Britain. They were called *Scotti*,” he observes, “ just as the Arabs were called Bedouins, or Saracens.” It may be proper to add, that the names *Scots* and *Scotland* are totally unknown, at this day, to the Highlanders. They call themselves *Albanich*, and their country *Albin*.

of the Highlands of Scotland. Will my readers forgive me, for presenting it in Bæda's original, with a translation, of which they may all judge? Without any reference to the year 258, or any other year, Bæda says,—

*“ Procedente autem tempore, Britannia, post  
 “ Brittones et Pictos tertiam Scottorum na-  
 “ tionem, in Pictorum parte recepit, qui duce  
 “ Reuda, de Hibernia progressi, vel amicitia,  
 “ vel ferro, sibimet, inter eos, sedes quas hac-  
 “ tenus habent, vindicarunt; a quo videlicet  
 “ duce, usque hodie Dalreudini vocantur, nam  
 “ eorum lingua Daal partem significat; ”*—  
 that is,

“ In process of time, Britain received,  
 “ after the Brittones and Picts, a third na-  
 “ tion of *Scotti*, in the district of the Picts,  
 “ who, leaving Ireland, under the conduct  
 “ of Reuda, obtained, for themselves, the  
 “ settlements amongst them which they now  
 “ possess; from which leader, they are, at



“ this day, called *Dalreudini*; for, in their language, *Daal* signifies a part.” \*

It appears, upon the whole, that it was the opinion of Bæda, that Britain was originally peopled, by the south, from Aremoric Gaul, a district which, by the testimony of Pliny and Claudian, was undoubtedly Celtic; and the very name of which, father Harduin, in his Annotations on Pliny, acknowledges to be of Celtic derivation. †

Besides this opinion of Bæda, with regard to the original population of the south of Britain, it is worth notice, that he states the Picts, a Scythian race, to have taken possession of the northern parts of the island,—undoubtedly the north-east coasts of Scotland,—where, at this day, we find reliques

\* The venerable author is wrong; *daal* signifies a field.

† “ *Armorica*,” says he, “ *quasi* AR-MOR, *i. e.* “ on the sea.”

of the Pictish language, monuments, and history.

Finally, with regard to his mention of the invasion of Reuda, it is evident, that it amounts, by no means, to a conquest of the Highlands of Scotland, and far less to the establishment of a Dalriadan kingdom. Indeed, Bæda is, even in what he advances here, totally unsupported by nearly contemporary writers, such as Jocelinus, Giraldus Cambrensis, and others, who, surely, in narrating the events of those times, would not have omitted such a remarkable occurrence. The whole business appears to be a gratuitous fiction of Pinkerton; and, from him, hastily adopted by Mr Laing, without examination or doubt.

The utter improbability of this fiction will appear still more evident, when we consider, that the Caledonians, as Tacitus informs us, brought more than thirty thousand warriors into the field, near two cen-

turies before the alleged expedition of Riada; a high degree of population, surely, at such a period, and in such a state of society. Is it to be supposed, that this numerous and warlike people, who had so often disputed the palm of victory with “the sovereigns of the world,” would allow themselves to be over-run, and dispossessed of their territories, by the comparatively small and ill-accounted horde, which could, at this period, be thrown in from the adjacent coast of Ireland? Within a century and a half before, Tacitus informs us, that an Irish chieftain, who had accompanied his father-in-law to Rome, and with whom he himself had frequently conversed, assured him, “that, at that period, a single Roman legion, with a few auxiliaries, would have been sufficient for the reduction of the whole island.”\*

\* Tac. Agric. c. 24.

Is this the nation that, in 258, could, with the imperfect means of those times for transporting troops by sea, send an army to Scotland sufficient to sweep off its aboriginal inhabitants with such complete extermination?

The truth, on this part of the subject, seems to be, that Ireland derived its original population from Scotland. This was the opinion of Sir James Ware;\* of Sir William Temple; of Sir William Petty;† and of the best informed writers of both countries. Indeed, it is the opinion of Sir James Ware, that nothing certain is known of Irish affairs, till the middle of the fifth century. To these, we may add the opinion of Mr Gibbon, who was abundantly acute in his investigations; and, surely, in no degree prejudiced in favour of Caledonian antiqui-

\* *Antiq. Hib.* ch. 2.

† *Polit. Anat.* p. 101.

ties:—"It is probable," says he, "that, in  
"some remote period of antiquity, the fer-  
"tile plains of Ulster received a colony of  
"hungry Scots; and that the strangers of  
"the north, who had dared to encounter the  
"armies of the legion, spread their con-  
"quests over the savage and uncivilized na-  
"tives of a solitary island."

Thus, then, it appears, that no historical evidence has yet been adduced to shew, that this narrow corner of Celtic Europe, the Highlands of Scotland, has been conquered by any foreign power, or that its inhabitants have been, for the last 1500 years, at least, placed in circumstances that could tend to obliterate their language, their manners, or their institutions. It is true, this district has, in consequence of the abolition of the Druidical order, been long deprived of the lights of philosophy, which had, in former times, rendered Britain illustrious, and made her the resort of the learned; and the con-

sequence has been a long night of barbarism and ignorance.

It is to be remarked, however, that amidst all this barbarism, which overwhelmed the last fifteen centuries, the establishment of the Bards was preserved inviolate, and was actually continued in Scotland, as can be sufficiently proved, till within less than one hundred years; and, if the Bards, when deprived of their masters, the Druids, were incapable of adding any thing to the treasures bequeathed to them by better times, they seem to have proved faithful depositories, at least, of the stock that had been committed to their care.

The Bardic order is attributed, by all the ancient writers, to the Celtic nations; and it is extended by Tacitus,\* under the same appellation, to the Germans. Posidonius tells us, “that, when the Celts go to war,

\* *De Moribus Germ.* c. 3.

“ they take with them associates, whom, says he, “ they call Parasites, who sing “ their praises, either in public assemblies, “ or to those who wish to hear them privately. These poets,” he adds, “ are called *Bards*.”\*

We know, from unquestionable authority, that the order of Bards was continued in Wales, till towards the end of the thirteenth century, when they were destroyed by the cruel policy of Edward I. But it must be remarked, that the Bards were not entirely extinct, in England, before the reign of Queen Elizabeth; till which period, there was a regular public competition of harpers maintained; and there is, at this day, as Mr Pennant informs us, in his Tour through Wales, a silver harp, awarded during that period, in the possession of the Mostyn family.

\* Cited by Athenæus, fol. ed. p. 246.

In Scotland, it is well known, that the Bardic order was preserved, in uninterrupted succession, till A. D. 1726, when Nial Macvurich, the last of the Bards, died, whose ancestors had, for several generations, exercised that office in the Clanranald family. In the Appendix to Mr Mackenzie's Report, we have the very interesting declaration of Lachlan Macvurich, the son of this Nial, in which he gives an account of the manner in which his father's manuscripts were dispersed and lost; and, particularly, of one large volume, which his father, by order of Clanranald, gave to James Macpherson, from Badenoch, (the translator of Ossian.) This declaration of Lachlan Macvurich, I, too, received, some years ago, by the obliging attention of Sir John Macgregor Murray of Lanrick, Baronet, in the original, with a translation by himself; but, as it has been already published in the Report, it is considered as unnecessary to repeat it.



Indeed, it is well known, that every great family, in the Highlands, had a Bard attached to it, whose office it was, not only to preserve the genealogy, and to record the achievements of the family, but also to retain, by memory, like the disciples of the Druids of old, a vast number of verses, which they recited, at the entertainment, to amuse the chieftain and his friends. Martin, in his *British Isles*, speaking of the *Æbudes*, seems, in this view, to give the true idea of the relation which the Bards bore to the ancient Druids:—"The *orators*," says he, (*i. e.* the Bards,) "after the Druids were extinct, "were brought to preserve the knowledge "of families," &c.

That the art of writing was, at the same time, preserved and practised, at an early period, in Scotland, has been undeniably proved, by the existence of ancient manuscripts, of which the late learned Dr Donald Smith has given a very interesting account in the

Appendix to the Committee's Report. One of these, the beautiful Gaelic manuscript, written, as it appears, by a monk of the eighth century, I have seen; and also a volume of poems belonging to the Highland Society of London, and written in the period of James IV. of Scotland. Of the poems, contained in the latter, some are entitled in Latin, "*Auctor hujus Ossian;*" and others in Gaelic, "*Udair sho Ossian;*" "*Udair sho Ullin.*" It is important to observe, that this ancient manuscript collection contains the episode of "the Maid of Cracca," introduced by Macpherson into the *third* book of Fingal, and still repeated, by many, in the Highlands of Scotland.\* It is given, by Mr Mackenzie, in the Report of the Committee, p. 95.

\* I had an opportunity of hearing this poem recited, in 1782, by an old Highlander, still, I believe, alive, with little variation. I shall afterwards give an account of it.

In arguing the improbability that such a body of poetry could have been handed down, by tradition, through so many ages, Mr Laing observes, “that three-fourths of “the civilized world have been employed, “since the æra of Fingal, in the recitation “of poems, neither so long nor so intricate “as Ossian’s; and, consider,” says he, “how “small a portion of the Psalms, or Liturgy, “can be preserved by memory, much less “transmitted by oral tradition, for a single “generation.”

This mode of reasoning, I confess, does not appear to me to be very philosophical. We know, that the memory, as well as the other powers of the understanding, is capable of a great diversity of directions, and of very diversified intensesness of application. It is, indeed, impossible to say, to what degree of perfection the memory may be carried by exercise. The disciples of the Druids, during their probation of twenty years, were

undoubtedly accustomed to commit to memory, as many verses, at least, as are contained in the Poems of Ossian, as we now have them. We may, every day, meet with instances of the extraordinary perfection to which, from particular application of the memory, this faculty may be carried. We meet, for example, with persons, unskilled in writing, who can, by a mental process, carry on long calculations, which, without the aid of his pen, would baffle the most skilful arithmetician. But, as the memory, when thus exercised, is capable of very wonderful efforts, so, when freed from the necessity of exertion, and accustomed to rely on subsidiary aids, it becomes feeble and unretentive. I know a person, who has been, for more than twenty years, versant in the poetry of ancient and modern Europe, who cannot, at this moment, repeat twenty lines together of poetry, in any language whatever; and yet, such is the memory of this

person, in other respects, that he has frequently carried home, and committed to writing, a favourite discourse which he has heard, of half an hour in length, nearly word for word. Indeed, this is done, and may be done, every day. But, when a man has his Homer or Virgil, his Pope and Shakspeare, at hand, why should he exhaust the powers of his mind, which may be otherwise more advantageously employed, in committing their verses to memory? And who thinks of getting the Psalms and Liturgy by heart, when he has a copy of them, at every instant, within his reach? But the most effectual proof of the possibility of transmitting poems, of very considerable extent, merely by oral tradition, is, that we know, on the best grounds, that this has been actually done.

The account, which Ælian gives us, of the original transmission of the poetry of Homer, is altogether to the purpose of our present argument:—"The ancients," he tells

us, “ sung, or recited, the poems of Homer, “ till they were collected by Lycurgus, in “ his travels in Ionia, and by him carried “ into Greece.”\* The poetry of Homer appears also, from the account of Ælian, to have been recited, originally, in detached pieces, (as I shall afterwards shew was the case of Ossian’s Poems,) till about one hundred and fifty years after Lycurgus, when they were arranged by Pisistratus, in the form of the Iliad and Odyssey, under which they now appear.

Thus were the poems of Homer, far more voluminous than those of Ossian, and, from the very structure of the verse, more difficult to be retained, transmitted by oral tradition, at least, till the time of Lycurgus, a period of about one hundred and sixty years; and, if this immense mass of poetry, of which the Iliad and Odyssey consist, were thus hand-

\* Ælian Hist. var. lib. xiii. c. 14.

ed down by memory, through so long a period, in a country like Asia Minor, so frequently the seat of war, and the theatre of foreign invasion, where is the improbability, that a much smaller number of verses should be transmitted, even through a much longer period, amongst a people exempted, at all times, from foreign invasion and intermixture; and possessed, besides, of an order of men expressly trained up and appointed to this office?

On this part of the subject, it may be proper to notice, more particularly, a circumstance in the manners of our forefathers, which is still fresh in the memory of many persons still alive. It is well known, that it was common, even within these fifty years, for the Highlanders, little occupied, in those days, in the pursuits of agriculture or manufactures, to assemble together, in each others houses, and to pass the long nights of winter in listening to their na-

tional tales and poetry; and, particularly, to the poetry ascribed to Ossian. Those persons, who could repeat much of this poetry, were held in high esteem; they were welcome guests in every family; and their stay was solicited and prolonged by the kindest attentions. It is unnecessary to multiply proofs of what is so generally known and acknowledged. The Reverend Mr John Macleod, in his letter to Dr Blair,\* says, “that they often laid wagers, on these occasions, who should repeat most of these poems; and to have a store of them on memory was accounted no mean acquisition. I know,” he adds, “some old men, who value themselves for having gained these wagers. The Highlanders,” says he, “at their festivals, and other public meetings, acted the Poems of Ossian.”

I shall only add, on this point, the testi-

\* Appendix to the Committee's Report, p. 28. 29.



mony of Captain Parker of Blochairn, near Glasgow, obligingly communicated by my friend, Robert Austin, Esq. Lieutenant-Colonel of the first regiment of Glasgow volunteers, which contains, besides, the important circumstance, that a considerable part of the poems, translated by Macpherson, were, immediately after their publication, collated, by him, on the other side of the Atlantic, with a recitation of the original, furnished, and translated at the moment, by a gentleman, whose integrity and intimate knowledge of the Gaelic language is beyond question.

“The Reverend Mr Charles Smith, a native of the island of Mull,” says Captain Parker, “was a gentleman of great respectability, universally esteemed, and well known to many gentlemen now in Glasgow, and elsewhere in this country. I became acquainted with him in 1758. Our intimacy continued during all his life.

“ I frequently visited him at his glebe, about  
“ three miles from Norfolk, in Virginia,  
“ upon the west branch of Elizabeth River.  
“ When friends meet abroad, particularly  
“ the natives of our country, the affairs of  
“ Scotland, and of our friends, are a never  
“ failing subject of conversation. I believe  
“ my friend, Colin Rae, Esq. late of Aiken-  
“ head, sent me the first copy of Ossian’s  
“ Poems, collected by Mr Macpherson, which  
“ came to Virginia. I soon carried it to my  
“ friend Mr Smith. Upon reading a few  
“ lines from the poem of Temora,—‘ Stop,  
“ sir,’ said he, ‘ I know that poem.’ He did  
“ repeat great part of it, and explained it  
“ with an exactness, to my astonishment,  
“ and scarcely credible; and so he did several  
“ of the others. I left the book with him.  
“ Upon returning it, he said, ‘ Had he been  
“ with Mr Macpherson, he could have given  
“ him some other (poems) of Ossian well  
“ worthy of preservation; that he remem-

“bered them almost from infancy; that  
“repeating them was the amusement of  
“the children and servants about his fa-  
“ther’s house, and generally in all the west  
“Highlands; that, still, walking or riding  
“alone, he pleased himself by repeating  
“them, having always considered that poetry  
“superior to all other, assuring me, that if  
“I understood the Gaelic, I would be con-  
“vinced that many beauties, in these poems,  
“could not be translated, without losing  
“greatly by the change.’ Mr Smith,” Cap-  
tain Parker adds, “died in 1772, or 1773,  
“I suppose about seventy years old.” Cap-  
tain Parker also cites the authority of his  
friend, Mr Dugald Forbes, “now living in  
“the neighbourhood of Stirling, as recol-  
“lecting perfectly well to have heard the  
“Reverend Mr Smith, in Virginia, often  
“mention his knowledge of these Poems,  
“previous to their translation by Mr Mac-  
“pherson.”

It is well known, however, that, within these last hundred years, the Highlands of Scotland have undergone more of political and domestic change, than they had done during the preceding fourteen centuries. The events that occurred in the years 1715 and 1745, have taught government the necessity of introducing an uniformity of manners and of sentiments throughout the whole island; and very effectual measures have been adopted for this purpose. The establishment of schools, and the consequent diffusion of knowledge; the general introduction of the English language; the construction of roads and bridges in the Highlands; and, above all, the abolition of the hereditary jurisdictions in 1748, have, in less than half a century, very nearly assimilated the habits and manners of the Highlanders with those of the other subjects of the empire.

Though this, in a political view, was a

consummation devoutly to be wished for, yet it had almost proved fatal to the remains of our ancient national poetry. There was a peculiar felicity in the period when Macpherson began his collections.\* Had this undertaking been deferred for thirty years longer, these Poems must have shared the fate of the Sibyl's volumes, and scarcely one-third of them would have been found remaining. Notwithstanding the diligence of Mr Macpherson, Dr Smith, too, has been so fortunate as to have obtained some precious gleanings of Ossianic poetry, a circumstance which affords no slight evidence of the authenticity of the whole. Some few reliques of Ossianic verse are still to be met with, in the memory of the aged; but, in twenty years hence, it is probable, that there shall not be a single person alive, who can recite,

\* About the year 1758. Of these collections, and the manner in which they appear to have been made, an account shall be afterwards given.

from tradition, a single verse of our Celtic bard.

In 1782, I had an opportunity of taking down, in writing, in the house of Professor Richardson of Glasgow, a Gaelic poem, of eighty-eight verses, from the recitation of Daniel Kerr, an old man, a native of Argyleshire, very lately, at least, alive, and residing at Paisley. He said, that he had a great deal of Ossian's poetry (*bardachd Ossein*) by heart, which he had learned, in his native country, in his youth. Being desired to fix on any poem that he pleased, he repeated, in a sort of recitative cadence, the episode of the Maid of Craca, already mentioned as introduced by Macpherson into the third book of Fingal. Of Macpherson and his collections, Kerr had never heard.

This same poem is published by Dr Smith,\* and in the Perth collection by Gil-

\* Seandana, p. 175.

lies; and it occurs, also, in the manuscript of the period of James IV. of which an account is given, by Dr Donald Smith, in the Appendix to the Committee's Report. These editions † differ slightly, as might have been expected, from that which I had from Kerr, by the addition, or omission, or transposition, of a few lines; but the poem is the same, and it is the same, in every material respect, with that which fell into the hands of Mr Macpherson.

I have to add, that Kerr did not deliver this poem in any connection with a larger work, as Mr Macpherson has given it in *Fingal*, but as a detached independent piece. It

† Mr Laing ridicules the term "editions," when applied to poems which were never committed to writing, or to the press. But he appears to mistake the sense in which the term is applied. It is used, in this instance, to<sup>r</sup> express the differences which necessarily arise, in recitation, from the greater or less accuracy, or the more or less perfect recollection, of the persons who repeat them from memory.

was under the same form, as Ælian tells us, that the poems of Homer were recited, and handed down, during more than three hundred years, when they were collected and arranged by Pisistratus. It would seem, that Mr Macpherson, (whether properly or not is not now the question,) performed nearly the same office with respect to the Poems of Ossian.

Indeed, this circumstance, together with another, which I am about to mention, may enable us to appreciate, with tolerable accuracy, the share which Mr Macpherson himself had in the work which he has published. It is well known, that, before the Highland reciter delivers his poem, he generally prefaces it with a short summary, in a kind of measured prose, of the principal events contained in the verses which he is about to recite. This outline of the poem is called the *Sgeulachd*, or Tale. Dr Smith informs us,



that he was obliged, on many occasions, to supply chasms in the poems, which he published, by inserting the corresponding passages of the *Sgeulachd*.\*

By the help of this outline, Mr Macpherson seems to have been enabled, at least to connect, in regular order, the several detached pieces which he found in tradition, according to the series of events to which they related; and, when a poem occurred, which could not, by this method, be made to coalesce with his larger work, he seems to have proceeded by two ways:— he either gives the poem in its detached state, as he found it, and as the lesser poems now appear in his publication; or he artfully introduces it as an episode, as he has done in the instance of the Maid of Craca, and in that of the expedition of

\* See his *Seandana*, pp. 86. 92, &c.

Larthon, in the close of the seventh book of Temora.

Of such episodes, indeed, skilfully introduced, and, in general, allied to the subject of the work, a great portion of the Fingal and Temora consists.\*

Thus we may be enabled, in some measure, to form an estimate of the amount of Mr Macpherson's labours, in this respect. He found, it is imagined, the disjointed members of our poet scattered abroad in tradition; and, it will perhaps be allowed, that he has brought them together again with no small felicity. But, it would seem, that, excepting this labour of collecting, and arranging, and translating, Macpherson has furnished nothing else, besides the exercise of good taste, and a sound criti-

\* Cesarotti, the Italian translator of Ossian, is of this opinion; and he remarks, that, in one instance, Macpherson has misplaced an episode.

cal judgment, which he undoubtedly possessed.

Besides the poem recited by Kerr, I have also to mention a short poem, undoubtedly ancient, transmitted to me by Professor Richardson, who had it from Mr Samuel Cameron, lately a student at the University of Glasgow, by whom it was taken down, in writing, from a Highlander, who had it by tradition. It begins,

*“ A mhic mo mhic, ’s’e thubhairt an righ  
“ Oscuir a righ nan og fhath,” &c.*

This poem appears, also, to constitute the original of a passage that occurs in the third book of Fingal, and translated by Mr Macpherson; \*—and I mention this poem, for the purpose of shewing, that here he has shewn himself to be the mere translator, by the undeniable fact, that he has trans-

\* It occurs in the Perth Collection, p. 34.

lated ill. The original of one passage, in this poem, is,

“ *Chuir iad gach cath le buaidh,  
 “ Is bhuanich iad cliu s gach teagmhail:  
 “ Is mairridh an iòmradh san dán,  
 “ Air chuimhn aig na baird an deigh sho.”*

These lines, literally translated, are as follows :

“ They fought every battle with success,  
 “ And won renown in every combat :  
 “ Their fame shall remain in the song,---  
 “ In the memory of the bards of after times.”

They are thus translated by Mr Macpherson:—“ They fought the battle in their youth; they are in the song of bards.” It were needless, here, to point out the injustice done to the original. One other instance will suffice. We have, in the original, these beautiful lines ;

“ *Bi mar bhuinne-shruth, reothairt geamhraidh,  
 “ Thoirt gleachd do naimhdean na Feinne ;*

“ *Ach mar fhann-ghaoth sheimh, thlà shamhruidh,  
 “ Bi dhoibhsin a shireas do chobhar.”*

This is, literally,

“ Be like the torrent of a winter’s tide,  
 “ To contend with the foes of the Fingallians;  
 “ But, like the faint breeze of summer, soft and  
     mild,  
 “ Be to those that seek thy aid.” \*

Which Mr Macpherson translates thus:—  
 “ Be thou a stream of many tides, against  
 “ the foes of thy people; but, like the gale  
 “ that moves the grass, to those who ask  
 “ thy aid.” It is evident, that, in the original, there is nothing of “ moving the grass;” and Mr Macpherson has lost the beauty arising from the contrast of the “ winter’s torrent,” and the “ summer’s breeze.”

\* In the above-cited stanzas, the reader will remark, in every couplet, the parallelism, or balancing, of the verses, which has been so well illustrated by Dr Lowth, in his *Treatise De Poesi Hebreorum*. It is probably the character of all early poetry.

In this, as in innumerable instances, which shall be afterwards adduced, we may clearly recognize the translator, and shall find it necessary to refer the original to another source.

## PART II.

*The unaltered State of the Language, in which these Poems have been composed.—The peculiar character and idiomatic Form of the Gaelic.*

THE languages of modern Europe, with which we are conversant, have been evidently formed on the model of the Latin; whilst this again appears to have borrowed its form and structure from the Greek, which was familiar to the poets and orators of Rome: and, it is even probable, that the Greek itself derived many of its terms and modes of expression from the Egyptians, and other Oriental nations, with whom the Greeks, at an early period, had frequent intercourse. We may accordingly trace, in all the modern languages of Europe, not only

the terms, but also the genius, the phrases, and the idiom, of the Greek and Latin.

From this circumstance, it has happened, that none of these modern languages, or even the Latin itself, has any peculiarly characteristic idiom. The Latin is no otherwise distinguished from the Greek, or the modern languages of Europe, which are derived from the Latin, from one another, than by the words which constitute these languages, together with the peculiar inflections of these words, and the particles by which they are connected. Hence, when we speak, or write, in English, for example, we adopt promiscuously the idioms, the turns of expression, and the construction of phrases, which may have struck our fancies, or impressed our memories, in the course of our reading, in all the other languages with which we are acquainted.

The modern languages of Europe, it is true, are not altogether destitute of some

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faint shades of idiomatic expression. Thus, as in the Latin, grammarians have pointed out a few phrases, which they have termed Grecisms; so, in the languages now spoken in Europe, a few modes of expression may be traced which bear some slight marks of idiomatic peculiarity. Still, however, in all these languages, the difference of idiom is so small as to be scarcely perceptible; whilst the affinities are so numerous, that it may be said, that all the modern languages of Europe, derived from the Latin, constitute only one *grand form of speech*, varied, indeed, in individual terms, and in the inflections to which they are subjected, but presenting almost no diversity of phrase or idiom.

Hence it is, that we find it an easy matter to transfuse any of these languages into any other of them, without losing the spirit or beauty of the original. In this transfusion,

no difficulty occurs, except in the very few idiomatic expressions which still remain.

Hence, also, it follows, that the more extensive our acquaintance is with the whole mass of writing, in all those kindred languages, the more copious will be our power of expressing ourselves in our own particular tongue. If we speak, or write, English, we shall find ourselves enriched, in English expression, by the literary stores which we may have amassed, from every other language, whether ancient or modern, with which we are acquainted. Here, it is true, we pronounce, or write, English words; but the phrase and idiom, in which a person, who is versant in other languages, expresses himself, is as much Latin, or Italian, or French, as it is English.

The Gaelic presents a very different appearance, to those who are disposed to enter into the philosophy of language. Indeed, it

bears so little resemblance to the ancient or modern languages of Europe, that, to persons, to whom these only are known, it becomes a matter of some difficulty to convey a just notion of its peculiar genius and character. The Gaelic is evidently an original language. It was carried, no doubt, by the Celts from their primæval abodes, and underwent, probably, the same changes that other languages have done, during their migrations to the west of Europe, where they finally settled.

But, whatever may have been the amount of these changes, during the progress of those migrations, the language of the Highlands of Scotland cannot have suffered much of material change, since the original settlement of the Celts in these regions. Except in their encounters with the Romans, and the temporary incursions of the Danes, in a subsequent period, they had, for a long series of ages, no intercourse, by conquest,

or by commerce, with any other country but Ireland, whose language was the same with their own.

Hence it has happened, as might be expected, that the Gaelic is a language altogether idiomatic; its turns of expression, and modes of phraseology, are entirely its own; and it appears to have nothing, in its construction and character, common with the other languages of western Europe. Hence, also, it is, that it is so difficult to transfuse original compositions, in this language, into any other; and that the very reverse takes place, with regard to the attainment of the Gaelic, in its perfection and purity, of that which I have just stated, with regard to the modern languages of Europe. The person, who is found to speak the Gaelic in its greatest purity of idiom, is the unlettered native of Mull, or Skye, or of the more remote corners of Argyle-shire, and Inverness-shire. But, bring this person into contact with foreign

idioms; teach him Latin, or English, or French, from that moment his native tongue becomes contaminated, by what a genuine Highlander would account barbarisms; he no longer retains the pure idiom of the Gaelic, he unavoidably mixes it with the idioms of the foreign language which he has acquired.

By those who are not acquainted with some original language unadulterated by foreign idioms, it will not, perhaps, be easily understood, that the purity, with which the Gaelic is spoken by any person, is directly as his want of acquaintance with every other language. An unlettered Highlander will feel and detect a violation of the idiom of his language more readily than his countryman, who has read Homer and Virgil.

A ludicrous instance, which will serve to illustrate this view of the subject, is recorded in the Appendix to the Committee's Report, (p. 95.) in the declaration of Ewan Mac-

pherson, a schoolmaster of Badenoch, who accompanied Mr James Macpherson in his researches through the Hebrides, and appears to have performed most of the drudgery of collecting and writing down the recitations of Gaelic poetry which they met with:—

“ On their way,” says he, “ to the seat of  
“ the younger Clanranald, they fell in with  
“ a man, whom they afterwards ascertained  
“ to have been Mac Codrum, the poet. Mr  
“ Macpherson asked him the question, ‘ *Am  
“ bheil dad agad air an Fhèine?*’ by which  
“ he meant to enquire, Whether or not he  
“ knew any of the Poems of Ossian, relative  
“ to the Fingallians? but the terms in which  
“ the question was asked, strictly import-  
“ ed, ‘ Whether or not the Fingallians owed  
“ him any thing?’ and Mac Codrum, being  
“ a man of humour, took advantage of the  
“ incorrectness, or inelegance, of the Gaelic,  
“ in which the question was put, and an-  
“ swered, ‘ That really, if they had owed

“ him any thing, the bonds and obligations  
“ were now lost; and he believed any at-  
“ tempt to recover them, at that time of  
“ day, would be unavailing.’ Which sally  
“ of Mac Codrum’s wit seemed to have hurt  
“ Macpherson, who cut short the conversa-  
“ tion.”

Of Mr Macpherson’s comparatively slight knowledge of the Gaelic language, other proofs will be brought in their proper place; but even the above may lead to a suspicion, that, however well he could write in English prose, he was unqualified to write ten verses of Gaelic poetry, in the style of the specimens furnished by himself. Indeed, when we speak of purity of language and idiom, it seems certain, that, if we could suppose a learned modern, placed in the Forum of ancient Rome, to address, in Latin, those very audiences which had listened to Cicero, he could imitate the style of that celebrated orator, with more ease and suc-

cess than it is possible for a Highlander, versed as Mr Macpherson was, in the ancient and modern languages of Europe, to approach the genuine idiom of the Gaelic. Of this genuine idiom, we have beautiful examples in the seventh book of *Temora*, published, at an early period, by Mr Macpherson himself; and, in some of the purer fragments of Gaelic poetry, given by Dr Smith. These poems bear, throughout, the stamp of antiquity. Some foreign, and even some modern *terms* sometimes occur, of the introduction of which, I shall afterwards, as I hope, be able to give a satisfactory account. But still the Gaelic *idiom* is maintained, and the purity of its structure preserved inviolate.



## SECTION IV.

*Of particular Terms and Expressions which occur in these Poems, and which Mr Laing argues to have been borrowed from other Languages.—The Opinion of Mr Pinkerton and of the Edinburgh Reviewers examined, with regard to the Gallic Invaders of the Italian Territory.—The Copiousness of the Gaelic, in Expressions, to denote the Appearances of external Nature, and the Feelings and Passions of the human Mind.—Estimate of Mr Laing's alleged Instances of borrowed Expressions.*

THE language, in which any work is written, and the particular expressions and allusions that may occur in it, undoubtedly afford a very obvious criterion of the period and state of society to which it is to be referred. But, in order to be qualified to appreciate this

kind of evidence justly, it would seem indispensably requisite, that the person, who ventures to offer verbal or etymological criticisms, on any work, should possess some knowledge of the language, in which that work is composed. Without this knowledge, it is idle to lay down canons of criticism: however just they may be, when abstractly considered; it is only the application of them that can give them any value.

Mr Laing's attempt to attain some acquaintance with the Gaelic language was surely laudable; but with the very imperfect knowledge of it, which he had acquired, it was, at least, a hazardous attempt to offer a critical and etymological discussion of the fragments of our poetry, which had fallen under his eye.

His remarks, on this part of the subject, however trivial and ill-founded, may have some weight with persons, who are still less qualified than himself, to judge of this mat-

ter. Some slight notice of these, therefore, appears necessary.

Without ascending, with Mr Laing, to the circles of Gomar, or tracing, with Giraldus, the aborigines of the British isles to the emigrations from Egypt, or Troy; it may be remarked, on the most authentic evidence of history, that the ancient inhabitants of Celtic Gaul, from whom, as is most probable,\* Britain derived its first population, were a powerful and numerous people, long before the Romans had obtained any distinction among the nations of Europe. We are informed, on the unquestionable authority of Livy, that, even in the reign of Tarquinius Priscus, the Gauls crossed the Alps, overcame the Tuscans, built the city of Milan, and occupied all the territory from the Po to the Alps. He adds, that successive hordes of the same people arriving from time

\* See *Bæda*, *Hist. Eccles. Angl.* c. 1. already cited.

to time, they at length extended their settlements as far as the Appenines.\*

We again find this numerous race, when the Roman territory had been just augmented with the accession of Veii, a city not more than thirty leagues distant from Rome, sending forth, from the superabundance of their population, an army of three hundred thousand men; one branch of which ravaged Italy, and sacked Rome itself; whilst the other, penetrating by Illyricum, entered Greece, laid waste its cities, and formed a settlement on the banks of the Euxine.† We learn, from Justin, that, about that period, almost all Italy was occupied by the Gauls;‡ and Plutarch tells us, that the Celts, at an early period, possessed the best part of Italy.§ The name of Cisalpine Gaul

\* Liv. lib. v. c. 34. 35.

† Just. lib. xxiv. c. 4. Liv. lib. v.

‡ Just. lib. xxviii. c. 2.

§ Plut. in Mario.

remained to that territory, even to the latest periods of the Roman empire; and we have good reason to believe, that the religion and rites of the Gauls were practised there, at least, as late as the siege of Aquileia.\*

With this extensive influence of the Gallic arms and name, at a period when Rome was yet in her infancy, and her language scanty and unpolished; and with the extension of this influence, through every period of the empire, is it credible, that the language of Gaul acquired no currency in Italy, and even in Greece? If, even in the time of Claudius, the Druidical rites were publicly practised at Rome, by the numerous Gauls who inhabited that city, is it to be supposed, that the language of Gaul was not also spoken there? †

\* Herodian, lib. viii. c. 7.

† Plin. Hist. Nat. lib. 30. 31. Suetonius, in Claudio, c. 25.; and Aurelius Victor.

It seems, indeed, to be highly probable, that the Latin has borrowed as many terms, at least, from the Celtic, as the Celtic has from the Latin. It was the opinion of the learned Leibnitz, “ that the Latin language  
“ was formed of the Celtic and of the Greek ;  
“ and that its origin is best illustrated by  
“ the genuine remains of the ancient Celtic,  
“ such as it was spoken in the days of Julius  
“ Cæsar, which, he presumes, are to be stu-  
“ died in the language of the Irish.”\*

I am aware, that it has been maintained, by many learned men, that the Gauls, who invaded Italy, were not Celtic, but German Gauls. Mr Pinkerton has supported this opinion; and it has been argued, with much acuteness and learning, by an ingenious writer, in an early number of a literary journal, which does honour to Scotland.† It is maintained, “ that the enumeration and descrip-

\* Cited by Dr Smith, Append. Report, p. 264.

† Edinburgh Review, No. IV. Art. 7.

“tion, given by Polybius, of their different tribes, puts it beyond a doubt, that they were German Gauls. He particularly names,” it is added, “the Veneti, Semnones, and Boii.”\*

This, I would observe, is a question of very considerable importance, not only with regard to our present enquiry; but, as the learned journalist very properly remarks, it is “intimately connected with the researches and speculations of the philosopher.”

I begin by observing, that the only account of the boundaries and extent of Celtic Gaul, on which we can rely, is that of Julius Cæsar. It is very singular, that Strabo, in the very passage in which he treats of this subject,† whilst he professes particularly to follow Cæsar’s account, really advances one which is totally different; so that the learned

\* Edinburgh Review, No. IV. p. 366.

† Strabo, lib. iv. *ad init.*

Casaubon, in his animadversions on that passage, remarks, “ that Strabo had either not  
 “ read Cæsar when he wrote, or that the  
 “ Commentaries were then different from  
 “ those which we have now amongst our  
 “ hands.” Accordingly, Strabo appears to  
 have committed many mistakes, in his account of the Celtic Gauls.\*

Omitting, then, his account of the Celtic territory, we find its boundaries precisely defined by Cæsar.† Besides informing us, that the Celts are the same people who are called Gauls by the Romans, he tells us, “ that  
 “ the Garonne divides them from the Aquitani, and the Marne and Seine from the  
 “ Belgæ.” Again, he says, “ that part of  
 “ Gaul, which they (the Celts) possess, begins  
 “ with the Rhone; (*i. e.* on the east;) it is  
 “ bounded by the Garonne, the ocean, and

\* Strabo assigns the institution of the Druids, which, by the consent of all, is Celtic, to the Belgæ.

† Cæs. de Bell. Gall. lib. i. c. 1.



“ the territory of the Belgæ; (*i. e.* on the  
“ west and north;) it reaches from the coun-  
“ try of the Sequani and Helvetii to the  
“ Rhine; *it verges* northwards.” By this ac-  
count of one, who will surely be considered  
as the highest authority on this subject, it  
appears, that Celtic Gaul comprehended by  
far the most extensive and the richest third  
of France; and that it included all that ter-  
ritory which lies between the Garonne, the  
Rhone, and the Seine, from their sources to  
the sea, on the one hand; and the Atlantic  
Ocean, and the British Channel, on the  
other.\*

The accounts of the most respectable writ-  
ters of antiquity concur in assigning great  
extent of territory and of influence to the  
Celts. Dion Cassius † writes, “ that the  
“ nations on both sides of the Rhine were  
“ called Celts of old, long before Cæsar’s

\* See the Maps of ancient Geography by Cellarius.

† Lib. xxxix.

“time.” Diodorus Siculus\* says, “that all  
“the nations bordering on the Alps and  
“Pyrenees, as far as Scythia, were Celts;”  
and Polybius,† “that the Gauls, Germans,  
“and the greatest part of Spain, were dis-  
“tinguished by the name of Celts.”

Adverting, then, to the position of the learned journalist, which he founds on the authority of Polybius, “that the Veneti, the  
“Semnones, and Boii, who invaded Italy,  
“under Brennus, were German tribes,” I observe,—

1. With regard to the Veneti, that we read, in ancient authors, of two powerful tribes, who went under that denomination; the one were the Veneti of Gaul, who occupied Brittany, in the bosom of the Celtic territory, and formerly called, by a Celtic name, Armoric Gaul. With regard to them,

\* Lib. v. c. 9.

† Lib. iii.

Cæsar informs us, “ that their authority was  
 “ the most extensive of all on the sea coast  
 “ of those regions; that they had a numer-  
 “ ous navy, with which they were wont to  
 “ sail to Britain; that in skill and experi-  
 “ ence in naval affairs, they excelled all  
 “ others; and that, hence, they held all, who  
 “ navigated those seas, as their tributaries.”\*

The other tribe were the Veneti of Italy, situated on the Adriatic. With regard to these, Justin says, “ that they came from  
 “ Troy, after it was taken, under Antenor.”†  
 But Strabo, with much greater probability, asserts, “ that they were descended from the  
 “ Veneti of Gaul.”‡ Thus, then, it appears certain, that the Veneti, who invaded Italy under Brennus, were not Germans; and there is even a high probability, that they were directly from Armoric Gaul.

\* Cæs. Bell. Gall. lib. iii. c. 8.

† Just. lib. xx. c. 1.

‡ Strabo, lib. iv.

2. With regard to the Semnones, I must remark, that Polybius no where mentions a tribe of that name, amongst the invaders of Italy.\* Tacitus, indeed, makes mention of the Semnones, as a tribe of the Suevi;† but no author, that I know of, states *them* to have invaded Italy. The invaders of Italy, of whom Polybius speaks, were the Senones, a people of Celtic Gaul, whose capital was Agendicum, now Sens; and who, after their invasion of Italy, settled in the fertile plains of Lombardy, and gave the name of Senogallia to that district.‡ But the matter is placed beyond all question by Livy, who enumerates the Senones amongst those tribes of Celtic Gaul, (as he expressly states them,) who invaded Italy, in the reign of Tarquini-

\* The name does not occur, at least, in the edition before me, *Amstelodami ap. Janssonium*, 1670.

† Germ. c. 39.

‡ Cluverii Introd. Geog. pp. 68. 180. 184.

us Priscus;\* and, it is certain, that they were the same tribes who, in after ages, continued to make similar incursions.

3. Concerning the Boii, Tacitus informs us, on the authority of Cæsar, “ that the  
 “ Gallic states were more powerful in for-  
 “ mer times; and that it is credible, that the  
 “ Gauls passed over into Germany: there-  
 “ fore,” he adds, “ the Helvetii occupied be-  
 “ tween the Hercynian forest, the Rhine, and  
 “ the Maine; and the Boii, further on; both  
 “ of them Gallic tribes. The name of Boi-  
 “ emi (Bohemians) still remains, denoting the  
 “ ancient memory of the place, though the  
 “ inhabitants are now changed.” † It ap-  
 pears, from another passage of the same au-  
 thor, “ that the Boii were expelled, from  
 “ their newly acquired settlements, by the  
 “ Marcomanni.” ‡ But whatever may have

\* Liv. Hist. lib. v. c. 34.

† De Mor. Germ. c. 28.

‡ Ib. c. 42.

become of those emigrants from Gaul, we know, that the Boii, the stock from which they sprung, were situated in the Celtic territory, on the western side of the Liger, in the vicinity of the Ædui, unquestionably a Celtic tribe. Tacitus places the Boii in this situation, and speaks of them expressly as “the neighbours of the Ædui.”\*

I have only further to remark, with regard to the inference drawn by the learned journalist, from the name of the leader of those invaders, Boiorix, that it does not appear to be well founded: he observes, “that it is evidently of Gothic structure.” If any conclusion, however, can be drawn from obscure etymologies, it would seem, that this name bears more of Celtic than of Gothic character. The Dumnorix of Cæsar was an Æduan, a Celt, and a native of the bosom of Celtic Gaul. Vercingetorix, ano-

\* Tacit. Hist. lib. ii. c. 61.

ther name of similar formation, appears also to be Celtic, from the initial *ver*, or *fer*, “ a “ man.”

Upon the whole, then, it seems certain, that the Gauls, who invaded Italy, from the period of Tarquinius, to that of the sacking of Rome, were really of Celtic stock; and, therefore, it might be expected, that their language would influence that of the Romans, in a very material degree; hence, it follows, that no legitimate argument, against the authenticity of Ossian's Poems, can be derived from the similarity that may be traced between certain Latin and Gaelic terms.

It may be remarked, on this part of the subject, that no language abounds more than the Gaelic in expressions to denote the different appearances of external nature, with all the varieties of which they are susceptible, in a region of such unequal surface and

climate as Scotland. The almost endless variety that occurs in the height, and structure, and figure of mountains; in the extent, and current, and windings of rivers and streams; in the form and distribution of woods and lakes; and especially in the changes and appearances of the atmosphere, have, in the Gaelic, more copious and appropriate denominations than in any other language with which I am acquainted.

This language also abounds in terms to express the feelings and passions of the human mind, as joy, grief, melancholy, or sadness, hope, fear, anger, hatred, &c.; and also to denote the ordinary circumstances and relations of society, and of individuals, as love, courtship, marriage, kindred, birth, death, prosperity, and adversity: for terms to denote these two great classes of objects, the Gaelic has no need to have recourse to any language whatever.

The terms of art to be found in this lan-



guage are few; but there are terms to denote the few arts and instruments, which their circumstances rendered necessary to the Caledonians, and which we know them to have possessed; as a sword, a spear, the upper garment of a warrior, a smith, iron, a boat, sails, &c.

But it is important to remark, that it is of those two classes of terms, which I have stated to abound in the Gaelic, almost the whole mass of language, in which the fragments of Ossian, which have been published in the original, consists. Descriptions of scenery, of the appearances of the atmosphere, and of the changes of the seasons; an account of the operation and effects of the feelings and passions of mankind, together with reflections on the ordinary circumstances of society and of individuals, constitute, almost exclusively, the Poetry of Ossian.

Wherever, then, any of these terms occur,

which *appear*, as in a few instances is the case, to bear a resemblance to corresponding terms in another language, there is, when we consider the undoubted antiquity of the language of Gaul, just as much reason to conclude, that it is originally Celtic, as that it is originally Latin, or Saxon. We have an example, in point, in the title *Vergubretus*, which, Cæsar tells us, was given, by the Gauls, to the temporary judge, or chief, whom they chose upon extraordinary emergencies; and, even to “the extravagance “of a Celtic etymologist,” it will not be denied, that this term signifies, literally, “a “man to judge.”\* Whether the *ver*, or *fer*, of the Celts, or the *vir* of the Romans, be the original, it is needless to enquire. In whatever way the matter be decided, we have the term sufficiently early for the use of Ossian.

\* *Fer*, a man,---*gu*, to,---*breth*, judge, is Gaelic at this day.

In the same manner, though *cloidhe*, a sword, bears some resemblance to the *gladius* of the Latins, it does not follow, that the former has been borrowed from the latter. We know, from Tacitus, that the Caledonians wore long swords seventeen hundred years ago; and, there is good reason to conclude, that, four hundred years before that period, Brennus and his troops left, with the Romans, such an impression of their swords, as might serve to perpetuate their name for that instrument. The same remark may be applied to *saighid*, an arrow, resembling the Latin *sagitta*, and to many similar instances of resemblance.

Indeed, of the terms which are found to have this resemblance in the Celtic and in the Latin, and to which the former seems to have as just a claim as the latter, the number is very considerable, and seems to justify the observation of Leibnitz, already cited, “that the origin of the Latin is best

“ illustrated by the genuine remains of the “ ancient Celtic.” David Powel, in his Annotations on Giraldus Cambrensis’ Description of Wales,\* gives a long list of Welsh terms, which resemble the Latin in sound, as well as in signification. He adds, “ that “ he could have produced *six hundred* more “ of such terms, not,” says he, “ recently “ introduced, but used, even by the vulgar, “ more than *a thousand* years ago.”

For the amusement of those, who may be curious in this kind of literature, I subjoin a few terms, from Powel’s list, *adding* the Gaelic and the English of each.

<i>Welsh.</i>	<i>Latin.</i>	<i>Gaelic.</i>	<i>English.</i>
Aradr,	Aratrum,	Arar, ( <i>corn</i> )	A Plough.
Arneu,	Arma,	Arm,	Arms.
Aur,	Aurum,	Or,	Gold.
Awr,	Hora,	Uair,	An Hour.
Ber,	Veru,	Bir,	A Spit.

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\* Cambriæ Descriptio, c. 15. Powel wrote in 1585.

<i>Welsh.</i>	<i>Latin.</i>	<i>Gaelic.</i>	<i>English.</i>
Car,	Carrus,	Carbad,	A Chariot, or Car.
Casw,	Caseus,	Cais,	Cheese.
Cely,	Celare,	Ceil,	To Conceal.
Dilyw,	Diluvium,	Dil,	A Deluge, or Flood.
Lhin,	Linum, item Linea,	Lin, or Linn,	Flax, or a Ge- neration.
Lhuric,	Lorica,	Luireach,	A Coat of Mail.
Lhyver,	Liber,	Lcabhar,	A Book.
Mel,	Mel,	Mil,	Honey.
Môr,	Mare,	Muir,	The Sea.
Mynyth,	Mons,	Mona',	A mountain.
Nos,	Nox,	N'ochd,	Night.
Pawl,	Palus,	Poll,	A Pool.
Porth,*	Portus,	Port,	A Harbour.
Sych,	Siccus,	Sèc,	Parched.
Tarw,	Taurus,	Tarbh,	A Bull.
Tir,	Terra,	Tir,	Land.
Tyst,	Testis,	Teist,	A witness.

It were an easy matter to add another six hundred, to Mr Powel's six hundred words, of which it is equally probable that the ori-

\* See Cambden, p. 227.

gin was Celtic, as that it was Latin. I have seen a specimen of an intended work, on this subject, by an ingenious friend, the Reverend Mr Donald Macintosh, Gaelic secretary to the Highland Society of Scotland, which, for the sake of literature, it were to be wished he would yet accomplish. From such a work, ably executed, it would be seen, how much the languages of Europe owe to the Celtic.

After what has been advanced, it seems unnecessary to advert to Mr Laing's observations on the Gaelic, *talla*, "a hall," or, more properly, "a recess." *Mac Talla nan Creag*; *i. e.* "the Son of the Recesses of the Rock," is the epithet which has always been, and is still, given by the Highlanders to Echo. *Speur*, "the sky," resembles, indeed, as he remarks, the *sphæra* of the Greeks; but it is certain, that the term, with us, is ancient; it might have been introduced into Gaul by the Phœcean colony, or it might have been

introduced into Greece by the Celtic invaders.

Taking Mr Laing's objections in the order in which they lie, I cannot help adverting to his solemn trifling on the "wings of the wind" of Ossian; and on the term *cliadh*, used, in Malvina's dream, to denote the human *chest*. The "wings of the wind," says the learned gentleman, "is to be found only, where it was unavoidable, in Buchanan's Psalms:

" *Levibus ventorum adremigat alis.*"

Has Mr Laing forgotten the

" *Madidis notus evolat alis,*"

of his old school-book Ovid? and might he not even have recognized the origin of Buchanan's "unavoidable" expression in the "*Remigium alarum*" of Virgil?

"*Cliadh*," says Mr Laing, "is an anticipation of the English idiom, and is liter-

“ally the same with *cista*.” Now, I must be permitted to inform the learned gentleman, that *cliadh* is neither literally nor metaphorically the same with *cista*. *Cliadh* signifies, literally, “a *basket* of osiers, woven upon ribs;” an obvious and just image, it will probably be admitted, to represent that part of the human body, which, in the English language, is called the *chest*. How the English *term* (I do not, with Mr Laing, call it the English *idiom*) arose, and whether it be more appropriate than the *basket* of the Celts, is, at present, out of the question.

Of a great number of the terms adduced by Mr Laing, as bearing a near resemblance to the Latin, besides the general considerations on this subject, which have been already offered, I must say, that the perception of their similarity eludes my eye and my ear. He adduces the similarity of *phosda* and *sponsalia*, (marriage); *samhla*, pronounced *sau'la*, (appearances,) and *similis* (like);



*feachda*, and *fighths*. It is true, there is a letter or two common to the Gaelic, and the Latin or English words. There is an *s* in *samhla*, and there is an *s* in *similis*; there is an *f* in *feachda*, and in *fighths*; but all this is sheer Fluellenism. “There is a river in Macedonia, and there is a river in Monmouth, and there are salmons in both.”

“*Loingheas* and *long*, a ship,” says Mr Laing, “are undoubtedly derived from the “*naves longæ* of the Romans.” Cambden, however, informs us, that *llong* is the British, or Welsh, term for a ship;\* and it probably was so as far back as the period of Ossian; so that it is of little consequence whence it has been derived.

I shall conclude this part of the subject, which must appear so uninteresting to general readers, by adverting to Mr Laing’s criticisms on the term *fasach*, “a desert,”

\* Britannia, p. 227.

which occurs so frequently in the Poems of Ossian. “The desert,” he observes, “is a  
 “correlative term, suggested by its contrast  
 “with peopled and cultivated fields; but, as  
 “all places were equally desert to a tribe of  
 “hunters, who subsisted in the desert, there  
 “was no relative to suggest the idea or the  
 “name.”

This criticism is, at least, specious; but it is founded on a misconception of the term which is criticised. The adjective *fas*, and the substantive *fasach*, which is derived from it, really signifies *waste, desolate*, in opposition to *peopled, or inhabited*, and not in opposition, or contrast, to *cultivated*. In every country, then, where there are dwellings of men, this term has its obvious correlative.

Mr Laing objects, on the same ground, to the term *autumn*. I shall afterwards shew, that Mr Macpherson has introduced this term, where there is no expression or idea in the original, by which it might be even

suggested.\* That season of the year, however, which *wæ* denominate autumn, is frequently mentioned by Ossian; but in no instance whatever, as relative to corn, and crops, and the operations of husbandry. That season is uniformly mentioned by Ossian, in relation to the appearances which Nature then presents, when the day shortens, when vegetables decay, when the leaves fall, and when the dark season (*dùlach*) approaches.

It is, at the same time, proper to observe, that there is a circumstance that has not hitherto been attended to, which may have, in some degree, affected the language of the remains of this ancient poetry, which are still preserved. Though the language of the Caledonians has continued, from the causes, of which notice has been taken al-

\* See the annexed new translation of the Seventh Book of Temora, ver. 367.

ready, less influenced by foreign mixture than any other language of Europe; yet, with the lapse of ages, it must have happened, that *a few* terms should become obsolete; and that others, of more recent origin, should be introduced in their stead. Of this substitution of modern terms, for others, which had, in some measure, become obsolete, I had a striking instance, under my own observation:—Robert Macneill, an old man, still alive, and residing in my neighbourhood, recited to me, within these few years, the long poem of Manos, as it is to be found in the Perth Collection, (p. 18.) in thirty-seven quatrains, which I took down in writing. I remarked, that when any term occurred, which I did not readily understand, and of which I required an explanation, he always adopted a method, which seemed to be easier to him than to give an explanation. He immediately began the stanza anew, and dextrously substitu-

ted a more modern term, of similar import, and, what shewed considerable presence of mind, of the same measure: but this substitution extended only to a few particular terms; the sentiment was in no instance altered.

Thus *a few*, and but a few, questionable terms may have been introduced into these recitations; and thus their introduction may be accounted for. But, whatever may have been the origin of some of those terms, on which Mr Laing animadverts, it is certain, that Mr Macpherson had no share in the coinage of any one of them. Independently of the Poems of Ossian, we have, in other Gaelic poems of undoubted antiquity, and also in the fragments of ancient Welsh and Irish poetry, abundant proof of the use of those terms, from a very remote period. For this proof, I refer to all the collections of Irish and Welsh poetry, to Giraldus Cambrensis, and to Cambden. In

an ancient war song, which we know to be of A. D. 1411, we have the term *borb*, “*barbarous*,” on which Mr Laing remarks so exultingly.\*

\* See Macdonald's Collection, p. 6.

## SECTION V.

*Mr Laing's alleged Imitations of ancient and modern Authors considered.—Avowed Imitations, and accidental coincidences of Thought and Expression, in Authors who could not possibly have had any Communication with each other.—Canons of Criticism, applicable to this Subject, with Examples.*

THERE is no part of his Dissertation which Mr Laing has laboured more, and on which he seems to lay greater stress, than his alleged detection of Ossian's imitations of certain passages in the sacred scriptures, and in the ancient classics; and though the best judges of this subject, with whom I have had occasion to converse, agree, in accounting this part of his Treatise the most inconclusive, yet I have reason to believe, that

on a number of his readers it has made a considerable impression.

It must be acknowledged, that this is a topic which will naturally occur, in the discussion of the present question, as affording a very obvious criterion of originality. Mr James Macpherson was brought up in the bosom of polished society; he received an university education; his mind was enriched with the stores of ancient and modern literature; he was familiarized, from an early period of life, to the modes of acting, and thinking, and expressing himself, which characterize the scholar of the present times. That a person of such education, and of such habits of thinking, should so completely divest himself of all his previous acquisitions in literature, and science, and of every idea rendered familiar to him by long use; and that he should be able to write, with uniform consistency, in the character of a person who is supposed to have lived



fourteen hundred years ago, and in a state of society so different from the present order of things; in short, that a modern European should produce such a work, as the Poetry of Ossian, distinguished, exclusively, by the ideas peculiar to a people in the most simple state of society,—all these, I confess, I must consider as efforts beyond the reach of humanity.

From what we know of human nature, and of what the human mind can perform, it would seem impossible to exclude, from such a work of a modern, every idea that belongs to the present times, and every allusion to the peculiar habits, and discoveries, and relations of modern Europe. One should expect, that, in every page, the tones of modern polished society would introduce themselves, and produce a discordant note; that the ideas of agriculture, of commerce, and, especially, the ideas of Christianity, which, in these times, occupy so much space

in every mind, would, from time to time, rush in, and give their own colouring, even to the picture of the life of wanderers and hunters. “ Though you expel Nature with “ a fork,” said one who knew mankind well, “ she will always return upon you.”\* The peculiar habits of modern polished life, are, to us, a second nature, and we can by no effort entirely divest ourselves of them. To invent, like Psalmanazar, a new language, to combine the letters of the alphabet in an unheard of form, and to ring a chime of unheard of inflections on those combinations, were nothing to this. It might be done by Swift’s Laputan table. But did Psalmanazar venture to commit himself, by giving us a continued composition in this new language; a pretended original production of a Formosan, with all its peculiarities of idiom, of local allusion, and habits of think-

\* Horace.

ing and expression? He was too wise for this.

If we find, in Ossian, clear and unequivocal evidence of allusion to modern ideas, manners, or events; if we discover the peculiar modes of thinking, or of expression, which belong to modern times; or if we detect palpable imitations of ancient authors, with whom he could not possibly have been acquainted, this poetry must be modern, and Ossian must be abandoned. But, on the other hand, if we discover nothing but what it was natural for Ossian to say and think, in the period and country in which he lived; if we find the peculiar manners of that state of society, in which he is said to have flourished, uniformly and consistently supported, together with a total absence of every thing that is foreign and modern,—justice and truth require, that these poems should be referred to the person and to the age to which they have been ascribed.

In order to judge truly, with regard to intended imitation, upon the one hand, and natural coincidences of thought, upon the other, it seems necessary, that certain distinctions should be made, and certain undisputed rules of criticism established. There are certain parallelisms of sentiment and expression, which occur in writers, so avowed and palpable, that we cannot hesitate to pronounce the one an imitation, or transcript, of the other. But we meet, at the same time, with coincidences in authors, who could not possibly borrow from each other, and which are yet so striking, that we can only pronounce them to have originated in our common nature, and in the common aspect which belongs to human affairs.

Thus, when I see Homer's story of Proteus\* copied almost literally by Virgil,† I

\* *Odyss.* lib. iv. v. 384.

† *Georg.* lib. iv. v. 415.

cannot possibly entertain any doubt of the imitation. The

“*Qualis in Eurotæ ripis, aut per juga Cynthi,*” \*

of Virgil, is avowedly an imitation of Homer’s

Ὅτι δ’ Ἀρτεμις ἴσι κατ’ ἕρως ἰοχαιφα.†

Virgil’s

—————“*Ipsa decoram*

“*Cæsariem nato genetrix lumenque juventæ,*‡

is as unquestionably borrowed from Homer’s

Τῷ κατεχευε χαρην κεφαλη κ’ ὠμοις.§

In these instances, and in numberless others, which occur in the Greek and Roman writers, there can be no doubt of in-

\* Æn. lib. i. v. 502.

† Odyss. lib. vi. v. 102.

‡ Æn. lib. i. v. 593.

§ Odyss. lib. vi. v. 305.

tended and avowed imitation. But there are parallelisms of thought, and of expression, to be met with, in authors, of which we must make a very different estimate. Thus, for instance, we find in Homer, and in the New Testament, the same image, and the same thought, expressed in nearly the same terms; and yet who will presume to say, that the latter is an imitation of the former? Homer says,

Τες δ', ὡς ἀπολῖα πλάτῃ ἀίγων ἀπολοὶ ἄνδρες  
 ῥεῖα διακρινέωσιν ἐπεὶ κε νομῶ μίγνῃσιν·  
 Ὡς τες ἡγεμόνες, ὄς.\*

That is:—“ As easily as goat-herds separate large flocks of goats, when they have mixed in the pasture, so,” &c.; and, in the New Testament, we have, “ And he shall separate them one from another, as

\* Iliad, ii. v. 474.

“ a shepherd divideth the sheep from the  
“ goats.” \*

What, again, can be more similar, both in thought and expression, than the manner in which Jacob describes the situation in which he shall be placed, should he be deprived of his favourite son, Benjamin; and that in which Priam describes his sorrow over the fate of his favourite son, Hector? “ Ye will “ bring down,” says the patriarch to the rest of his sons, “ my grey hairs with sorrow to “ the grave.” † Priam says, in nearly similar terms,

Τῶν πάντων ἔ τοσσον ὀδυρομαι——  
Ὡς ἑνος, ἔ μ' ἄχος ὄξυ καλοισεῖλαι αἰδοῦς εἶσω,  
Ἐκτορος. ‡

That is:—“ For all these, I lament not so  
“ much as for Hector alone, my bitter sor-

\* Matt. ch. xxv. ver. 32.

† Genesis, ch. xlv. ver. 29.

‡ Iliad, xxii. v. 424.

“row for whom will bring me down to the “grave.” And yet who will say here, that Homer copied the expressions of Jacob?

The truth is, that just criticism, as well as common sense, furnish us with certain unequivocal canons, by which to judge of designed imitation, and accidental coincidence in authors. Some of these, which seem to be applicable to this subject, I shall now take the liberty to suggest, and to illustrate.

I. As external nature presents, in every age, the same features, varied only by the difference of climate, and the limited operations of man, accurate observers of nature will describe those appearances, in every age, and in every country, by nearly similar images, and in nearly similar language.

The revolutions of the seasons, the growth and decay of vegetables, the phenomena of the atmosphere, and the various aspects un-



der which the scenery of nature appears, are permanent; they will strike all mankind with corresponding emotions, and will, consequently, be described by all, without regard to age or country, in a corresponding manner. It is true, the scenery of Arabia, and its productions, differ widely from those of Caledonia; and it is from these instances of difference, that the poetry and eloquence of those countries have received their distinctive and peculiar colouring. But, in Arabia, as well as in Caledonia, vegetables are covered with leaves, and flowers, and fruit, which, in their seasons, unfold themselves, ripen, and decay. In both those countries, flowers are fragrant, birds sing, fields are verdant in spring, and streams flow down declivities. These objects and appearances, therefore, will be described, in nearly the same terms, and nearly under the same images, of whatever age or country the describer be.

Accordingly, there occur, as might be expected, in Homer and in Ossian, poets who flourished in nearly similar circumstances of society, many corresponding images and expressions. If Homer describes his *ποταμος χειμαρρος*, his “winter’s torrent,” or his

—————ποταμοιο ρεεθρα  
’Οκεανυ————\*

That is, “the torrent of ocean’s tide,” Ossian, in almost the same words, has, in a passage cited above, (p. 95.) his

“*Buinne-shruth, reothairt geamhraidh.*”

That is,

“The torrent of a winter’s tide.”

We have, in Homer,

—————Παρα θινα πολυφλοισβοιο θαλασσης.†

\* Iliad, xiv. v. 245.

† Ib. i. v. 34.

that is:—"By the shore of the sea of many  
"sounds." Ossian, in Malvina's dream, has,

*"Cuan mor-shruil nan ioma fuaim;"*

that is, as nearly as it can be rendered in  
the English idiom,

"The swelling ocean of many sounds."

But who will affirm that Ossian copied Homer, in these descriptions of natural and ordinary appearances? Will not the poet of Caledonia describe the grand features of nature, with which he has had an opportunity to be conversant, the sea, a mountain, a river, or lake; or those particularly striking objects, the sun, the moon, the morning, and the morning or evening star, just as Job, or Moses, or Homer, or Hesiod did?

II. As the grand features of external nature are universal and permanent, so, with a few variations, arising from accidental cir-

cumstances, the leading features of the human mind have been found to be nearly similar, in every age and country. All mankind, of whatever period or nation, are not only affected in nearly the same manner, by the feelings of love and hatred, desire and aversion, hope and fear; but they generally express those feelings in similar language, and by similar symbols. Not to multiply examples, without necessity, in proof of so undeniable a position, I shall only instance the manner in which the feelings of grief have been expressed, in very distant ages and countries.

We find Job, in his sorrow for the severe loss of his children, “rending his mantle, “and shaving his head.” His friends, too, joined in his grief, “rending also their “mantles, and sprinkling dust upon their “heads towards heaven.”\* The king of

\* Job, ch. i. ver. 20. and ch. ii. ver. 12.

Nineveh expressed his sorrow for his sins, and those of his people, by “laying his robe  
“from him, by putting on sackcloth, and  
“by sitting in ashes.” †

It is by symbols, precisely similar, that Homer describes Achilles mourning over his beloved friend Patroclus :

Ἄμφοτεργῆσι δὲ χερσὶν ἔλων κόνιν ἀιθαλοεσσαῖαν

Χεῦατο κακῆ κεφαλῆς.—

Ἄυτος δ' ἐν κόνιῃσι μέγας μεγαλωσὶ τανυσθεὶς

Κεῖτο.—‡

That is:—“And taking up, with both his  
“hands, the black dust, (or ashes,) he threw  
“it on his head;—and he lay, stretched,  
“with his mighty length, in the dust.”

III. We may trace, in every country, and in every period of society, a striking same-

† Jonah, ch. iii. ver. 6.

‡ Iliad, xviii. v. 23.

ness in the general course of human affairs, as well as in the circumstances and fortunes of individuals. It belongs to the universal nature of human affairs, that the morning of youth should be cheerful, lively, and buoyant with hope; that more advanced life should be enterprising and daring; and that old age should be infirm, querulous, and disconsolate. It is in the nature of human affairs, that even the good and brave should sometimes be overwhelmed with misfortune; that the best concerted enterprises should fail; and that the unworthy should sometimes be crowned with prosperity and success.

On all these striking circumstances of human affairs, accordingly, it may be expected, that observing minds will make similar reflections; and that they will express those reflections by similar images, and in similar terms. Thus, speaking of the miseries of human life, Job observes, "That man is  
" born unto trouble: man, that is born

“ of a woman, is of few days, and full of  
 “ trouble.”\* And, in the same style, says  
 Homer,

— Δυστηνοισι μετ' ἀνδρασι, —  
 Ὅου μεν γαρ τι πω ἐστὶν οἰζυρωτερον ἀνδρος,  
 Πανίωv ὅσσα τε γαιαν ἐπιπνευει τε και ἐρπει. †

That is:—“ With the miserable race of  
 “ men;—for there is nothing more wretch-  
 “ ed (full of trouble) than man, of all that  
 ‘ breathe and move upon the earth.”

“ To every thing,” says Solomon, “ there  
 “ is a season; a time to keep silence, and a  
 “ time to speak.” ‡ Homer has the same  
 reflection, in almost the same words:

Ὠρη μεν πολλων μυθεων, ὦρη δε και ὑπνυ. §

The Psalmist describes the concord of

\* Job, ch. v. ver. 7. and ch. xiv. ver. 1.

† Iliad, xvii. v. 445.

‡ Eccles. ch. iii. ver. 1. and 7.

§ Odys. xi. v. 378.

brethren, by the following very beautiful images:—"Behold! how good and pleasant  
 "it is for brethren to dwell in unity; it is  
 "like the dew of Hermon, and as the dew  
 "that descendeth on the mountains of  
 "Zion."\*

Homer, on a kindred subject, the reconciliation of Menelaus and Antilochus, describes the emotions of the former, by images similar to those of the King of Israel:

————Τοιο δὲ θυμός  
 Ἰανθη, ὡσεὶ τε περὶ σαχυεσσιν ἔερση  
 Ληϊῶ ἀλδοησκοῖνος.——†

That is:—"And his mind was gladdened,  
 "as when the dew moistens the ears of the  
 "growing corn."

Numberless other parallelisms, both of thought and expression, occurring in the

\* Psalm cxxxiii.

† Iliad, xxiii. v. 597.



sacred scriptures, and in the more ancient Greek writers, might be produced, in which there can be no suspicion of imitation, but which naturally arise, from the similarity of the objects, and of the circumstances which are described. To seize the distinguishing traits of external nature, and of human character, is the high privilege of genius. It is of little consequence whether the poet be of Syria, or of Greece, or of the Highlands of Scotland; he will stamp the character of his genius on the scenes and events which he describes, and they will come forth from his brain, clothed with the drapery and colouring which belong to them.

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## SECTION VI.

*Particular Examination of Mr Laing's alleged Imitation of ancient and modern Authors.—Addresses to the Sun, Moon, and Evening Star.—Imitations of Pope, Job.—Maxims of the Highlanders concerning the Course of Human Affairs.—Imitations, continued in Mr Laing's Order, of Virgil, Catullus, Homer, Milton.*

WHEN we turn our attention from these parallelisms, of which the resemblance is so close and striking, and which can be thus easily accounted for, to the vague similarities, adduced by Mr Laing, between certain passages of Ossian, and of the ancient or modern classics, we cannot help perceiving a forced adaptation of images and expressions, which either have nothing in common be-

tween them, or which may be easily accounted for, on the principles which I have endeavoured to establish.

Where, even supposing Mr Macpherson's translation to be just, is the resemblance between Ossian's " Loveliness was around her  
" as light; her steps were the music of songs," and Milton's

" Grace was in all her steps, heaven in her eye,  
" In every gesture dignity and love,"

except the single term " steps?"—let any eye or ear judge concerning farther resemblance.

Did we not know Mr Laing to be serious, it would seem, that he had intended a burlesque upon criticism, when he maintains, that the

" *Seu solvit crines, fuis decet esse capillis*"

of Tibullus, which, literally, is:—" If she

“looses her hair, it becomes her to have  
 “flowing locks,” has furnished the original  
 of Ossian’s “If on the heath she moved,  
 “her breast was whiter than the snow of  
 “Cana.” Or, when again he maintains, that  
 Tibullus’

“*Seu composit, comptis est veneranda comis---*

“-----*Urit seu nivea, urit seu tyria,*”

That is:—“If she adorn her hair, she is  
 “graceful with adorned locks:—she in-  
 “flames, whether she is in white, or in  
 “purple,” is the original of Ossian’s “If  
 “on the sea-beat shore, than the foam of  
 “the rolling ocean.” In these alleged imi-  
 tations, I can discern nothing common, ex-  
 cept the particle *seu*, in the Latin, and *if*, in  
 the English; and I must beg leave again to  
 enter my dissent against the logic of honest  
 Captain Fluellen.

Ossian’s “Her dark hair flowed round it

“in streaming clouds,” is again, with Mr Laing, Tibullus’

-----“*Fusis decet esse capillis.*”

Surely Mr Laing supposes, that his readers cannot translate Tibullus, or that they are too indolent to compare the alleged resemblances.

In the poem of Cath-Loda, Mr Laing specifies, as what he calls “unintelligible bombast,” the following sentence of Ossian:—  
 “Whence is the stream of years? Whither  
 “do they roll? Where have they hid in mist  
 “their many-coloured sides?” I confess, that all this imagery appears to me beautiful and appropriate. “The lapse of time,” and “the course of human affairs,” are expressions, in ordinary use, in every language; they convey the same idea, and are founded on a similar metaphor with that of “the stream of years.” . But who does not perceive, that all these figures of speech origi-

nate naturally, in every reflecting mind, from the common observation of human life? Must we wait to find their origin in the truly admirable verses of Mr Blair :

“ Son of the morning, whither art thou fled ?

“ Where hast thou hid thy many spangled head ?”

I should not have been surprised, had Mr Laing traced the above-mentioned imagery of Ossian to a source, which, had it occurred to him, he might, in the humour in which he wrote, have been disposed to deem more appropriate. In the chronological chart of Dr Priestley, the extent and duration of empires, are represented by a stream, small and circumscribed in its beginnings, but swelling as it advances ; and occasionally, as was the fate of empires, disappearing, and lost in the “ mist of time.” In this same chart, he might have detected even “ the “ many coloured sides” of Ossian ; he might

have seen one empire distinguished in blue, another in red, and another in green.

Leaving the supposed imitations of Scripture for future consideration, I remark, in p. 413, the following quotation from Ossian:—"Comest thou, O maid, over rocks, "over mountains, to me?" This Mr Laing, compares to the verse of "an old ballad:"

"Over hill, over dale, over high mountains."

I most willingly concede to the learned gentleman any advantage which may be derived from this elegant morsel of criticism.

I come now, however, to consider a subject of higher import, the assertion of Mr Laing, (p. 414.) "that ostentatious addresses to the sun, moon, and evening star, "are, alone, a detection of modern poetry, "to which they are peculiar." If the learned gentleman had been able to establish this position in any other manner, than by his

ordinary manner of gratuitous assertion, it would have afforded, at least, a very important conclusion, though not a complete proof of his argument. Disclaiming the epithet "ostentatious," whether applied to those addresses that occur in Ossian, or to those which I shall adduce from Greek and Roman antiquity, I cannot help expressing my surprise, that the gentleman should have hazarded such an assertion, when he knows, or, at least, before he made it, should have known, that such addresses abound in the poetry of Greece and Rome.

I must premise, however, that the Greeks and Romans were influenced, in those addresses, by a very different mythology from that of our Caledonian ancestors; and that, consequently, they assumed, with each, a somewhat different form. The Greeks and Romans considered the sun, the moon, and the evening star, as constituting, as they actually do, distinct departments of inanimate



nature, but directed, each of them, by an intelligent being, a divinity, who presided over them, and influenced all their energies. The presiding divinity of the sun was Apollo, or Phœbus; of the moon, Diana; and of the evening star, Hesperus. To those presiding powers, accordingly, these addresses were most usually directed.

The Celts, again, as shall afterwards be shewn, paid divine honours to the sun chiefly, of all the celestial luminaries. But they do not seem to have considered the sun as under the influence of a local divinity, like the Greeks. They appear, indeed, to have regarded that luminary as the beneficent parent of light, and life, and heat, to this earth; but as, itself, under the controul of Destiny, having a beginning, and liable, like every other *creature*, to decay and destruction.\* If we attend to the account

\* See the opening of the beautiful fragment of Trathul, in Smith's Collection, where we have an address to

which Cæsar and others have given us of the religion of the Druids, it would seem, that the Celts worshipped the sun, only as the representative and emblem of that Power which made and governs all things.

Though, in the Greek and Roman poets, the more prevailing titles of the addresses in question, are to Apollo, to Diana, and to Venus; yet instances are by no means wanting of addresses to the sun, moon, and evening star, and other striking objects of nature, in the very same style and spirit in which they are introduced by Ossian.

Not to mention, then, the odes of Horace, of Anacreon and Sappho, addressed to the immortals of Olympus, I observe, that we meet with addresses, in the *manner* of Ossian, in that of Juno to *Sleep*, Iliad, xiv. ver. 180; to the same, in the *Orestes* of Euripides, ver. 211; to *Night*, *Orestes*, ver. 174;

the sun, which I consider as equal, if not superior, to that which occurs in Macpherson's *Carthon*.

to the *Air*, Aristophanis *Nubes*, ver. 263; and to the *Earth*, Sophoclis *Philoctetes*, ver. 403. All these addresses, though not directed to the sun, moon, or evening star, are made to similarly striking objects of nature, and are in the same style of personification with those of Ossian; they shew, at least, that this *manner* of writing does not belong, exclusively, to modern poetry. But I proceed to observe, that the ancients furnish us with direct addresses to the sun, the moon, and the evening star.

In the *Carmen Nuptiale* of Catullus, two most beautiful addresses to the evening star will be found; the one beginning,

“ *Hesperè, qui cælo fertur crudelior ignis;*”

and the other,

“ *Hesperè, qui cælo lucet jucundior ignis.*”

In the hymns ascribed to Homer, and which, whether they be Homer's or not, are

unquestionably of great antiquity, there is an address, or hymn, to the sun, “*Ἐἰς Ἥλιον,*” and another to the moon, “*Ἐἰς Σελήνην,*” both of which Mr Laing, should he take the trouble to peruse them, would, perhaps, be disposed to regard as ostentatious.

But I would observe, that it is in the choruses of Seneca, the tragedian, that we have the most frequent and appropriate addresses to the sun and moon, in the manner of Ossian. Thus, in his *Hippolitus*, act ii., to the moon :

“ *Regina nemorum, sola quæ montes colis*

“ *Et una solis montibus coleris dea :*

“ *O magna sylvas inter et lucos dea*

“ *Clarumque cæli sidus, et noctis decus,*

“ *Cujus relucet mundus alternâ face.*”

That is, literally :—“ O queen of the forests,  
 “ who, solitarily, inhabitest the mountains ;  
 “ and who alone art worshipped as a goddess  
 “ on the solitary mountains : O mighty god-  
 “ dess, amidst the woods and groves, bright

“ luminary of heaven, and ornament of night,  
 “ by whose alternate torch the world is en-  
 “ lightened.”

And in *Hercules Furens*, act iii., we have an address to the sun, which begins,

*“ O lucis alme rector, et cæli decus,  
 “ Qui alternæ curru spatia flammifero ambiens,  
 “ Illustre latis exeris terris caput,”* &c.

I would especially point out the address to the sun, in *Thyestes*, act iv., as possessing many ideas in common with the beautiful address to that luminary, given by Dr Smith, in his fragment entitled *Trathul*. Seneca's begins with,

*“ Quò terrarum superûmque parens,  
 “ Cujus ad ortus, noctis opacæ  
 “ Decus omne fugit, quò vertis iter,”* &c.

Which is, literally :—“ Whither, O parent of  
 “ earth, and of the powers above, at whose  
 “ rising every ornament of the dusky night  
 “ retires, whither dost thou turn thy course?”

In this address, Seneca has again,

“ *Quid te ætherio pepulit cursu ?*

“ *Quæ causa tuos limite certo*

“ *Dejecit equos ?*”

That is:—“ What hath driven thee from thy  
“ ethereal course ? What cause hath pushed  
“ thy steeds from their regular track ?”

Ossian, in the fragment alluded to, has,  
in his address to the sun,

“ The storms of the tempestuous seas

“ Shall never blow thee off from thy course.”

“ The steed, in his strength, who finds  
“ his companions in the breeze, and tosses  
“ his bright mane in the wind, is,” says Mr  
“ Laing, “ a literal and wretched transcript  
“ from Pope’s,

“ His head, now freed, he tosses to the skies ;

“ His mane, dishevelled, o’er his shoulder flies ;

“ He snuffs the females on the distant plain,

“ And springs, exulting, to his fields again.”

As to the “ wretchedness” of the transcript,

I shall offer no remark ; but, as to its being “ literal,” every reader may judge. If Ossian’s steed be allowed to have a mane, his mane will “ toss in the wind ;” but what is there in common between “ a bright mane” and “ a dishevelled mane ?” By the way, it is “ his head” that is tossed by the horse of the English poet, and not “ his mane.”

All this trifling might have been spared, had it been considered, that, in both these passages, the description relates to a striking object of nature—the horse ; and hence, according to the principles already laid down, similar circumstances will be introduced into the description, of whatever period or country the describer be. Referring, as before, to original sources, I observe, that we have an instance of this, altogether in point, in the descriptions of this noble animal, which have been given in the book of Job,\*

\* Job, ch. xxxix. ver. 19.

and in the Iliad of Homer,\* where many of the most striking images are common to the two authors; and the expression is, in some instances, also the same. The “*πεδίοιο κρή-  
αιων*” of Homer is, literally, “the paweth  
“in the valley,” of the Oriental writer; the  
“*κρηδισων*,” and “*ἀΓλαίηφι πεποιθως*,” of Homer,  
is, “the rejoiceth in his strength,” of Job.  
But who will maintain, that Homer, in this  
description, imitated Job?

“The description of Moina’s ghost,” says Mr Laing, “suggested *confessedly*” (who has confessed this?) “by Virgil’s Dido, is un-  
“expectedly improved.”

This is a mighty concession, indeed. But I *confess*, I can discern no similarity in the descriptions, except the common, the obvious, and the natural, image of “the moon  
“seen through mist.” Has Virgil so appro-

\* Iliad, xv. v. 263.



priated to himself this very familiar image, that it cannot occur, and must not be employed by any other poet?

In the same manner, though it should seem, that nothing is more obvious than to compare the sun, or the moon, to a shield, yet, as Milton and Home have occupied this image, it must be denied to Ossian; because Milton makes his stars "hide their diminished heads," Ossian's stars, which have been probably oftener obscured by clouds than Milton's, must not "hide themselves" upon any account; because Milton's sun has "*sole* dominion" ascribed to him, Ossian must take care that his sun shall not "move *alone*," but must find "a companion in his course." This seems to be strange criticism.

"That the oaks of the mountains fall;  
"and that the mountains themselves decay  
"with years, is," says Mr Laing, "a philosophical, or scriptural allusion, remote from

“the sphere of Ossian’s observation.” I would observe, that the sphere of his observation, and his talent for observing, must have been very circumscribed and mean indeed, if, in such a country as the Highlands of Scotland, he had not remarked the decay of aged oaks, and the wasting of the mountains by winter’s torrents, and by the fall of rocks. These are things to be observed every day.

Here I may be permitted to remark, that the Highlanders are distinguished, to this day, by the shrewdness of their observations, and by the propriety of their maxims, on the ordinary course of human affairs. The prevalent colouring of these maxims, and observations, is a certain pleasing melancholy, fostered probably by the sublimity, mixed with gloominess, of the scenery with which they are conversant, together with the frequency of disasters occurring to individuals, from accident, or from the inclemency of

the elements. The shortness and uncertainty of human life, and the prevalence of misfortune in the world, are the frequent topics of their reflections, and of their discourse. .

To illustrate this, besides referring to a very valuable collection of Gaelic proverbs, published by the Reverend Mr Donald Macintosh, I shall beg leave to adduce a few passages from the *Sean-dana* of Dr Smith, which I shall translate literally.

“ For ten and twice twenty seasons, in the vale,  
 “ Over Shithamha, withered the oak :---  
 “ Behold our days declining,  
 “ (Said he, at times, to his friend,)  
 “ Like the leaf of the oak, like the grass of the  
     hill :  
 “ One withers away after the other.  
 “ Like is the period of life, and of our years  
 “ To the quick rushing of a stone along a precipice.”

*Losga Taura*, p. 288.

“ How quickly pass the days of the hero !  
 “ He sweeps the heath, in the morning ;

“ But, before descends the night of clouds,  
 “ Nothing but his cold corpse is to be found.  
 “ Dark, short, without a sunbeam on the heath,---  
 “ The life of the hero is like a day of winter.”  
*Conn*, p. 266.

“ Like a gleam of the sun, in winter,  
 “ Rushing rapidly over the heath of Lena ;  
 “ Such are the days of the Fingallians,  
 “ Like the sun between showers, departing.”  
*Cathula*, p. 158.

Malvina, mourning after her sisters, says,

“ I am like the star of the morning,  
 “ Pale-visaged, after all the luminaries *of night* :  
 “ Brief is the course of her light,  
 “ As she travels after them, mournful.  
 “ The maiden arises to the mountain’s chace ;  
 “ But she beholds not her \* aspect above.  
 “ We shall depart in our own season,  
 “ (Says she, with tears, to her companions.)”  
*Losga Taura*, p. 305.

The parallelisms, founded on the blind-

\* That is, of the star of morning.

ness of Ossian, and that of Homer and Milton, are surely nothing else than the natural expression of the feelings of persons placed in similar circumstances. Because Homer and Milton were blind, must no other poet be so? and to all men, who are blind, is not "the sun dark?" to them does he not "shine in vain?" But that Mr Laing should discover the "hall to which the moon retires," at her change, in Milton's "vacant inter-lunar cave," is a stretch of imagination, and a discovery in astronomy, which are far beyond my powers.

Of the parallelism of Viigil's

*"Quale per incertam Lunam, sub luce maligna," &c.*

and Ossian's "glimmering light of the moon, when it shines through broken clouds," I would only say, that it amounts to nothing more than that men of genius, as I have already suggested, in describing the ordinary appearances of nature, will seize, in com-

mon, on the most prominent features, and necessarily produce a similar picture. Ossian was not, perhaps, as good an astronomer as Virgil; but he had probably as many opportunities, as the courtly inhabitant of Rome, of observing the picturesque scenery of moon-light; and, perhaps also, he had as powerful a talent in describing it.

The same remark extends also to Ossian's "flower of the rock, that lifts its fair head  
"unseen; and strews its withered leaves on  
"the blast." It may even be observed, that Ossian's image surpasses that of Catullus,

*"Flos in septis, secretis nascitur hortis,"*

in point of appropriate elegance; but it may, perhaps, be allowed to be inferior to Gray's

"Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,  
"And waste its fragrance on the desert air."

Had Ossian, or his translator, been merely

imitators, in this instance, they would probably have chosen "strews fragrance," instead of "strews withered leaves." The image, in all these instances, is beautiful; but it is obvious and natural; it has occurred to thousands, though, perhaps, it has not, by any others, been so well expressed.

"Oscar's soliloquy, when alone, in Caros," says Mr Laing, "is written in emulation of Ulysses' soliloquy in the Iliad." By parity of reason, we must conclude, that every other soliloquy of a hero, left in distress, must be written in *emulation* of the same Homeric model. It is to be remarked, that Mr Laing does not, in this instance, allege the most distant shade of imitation.

"Like the noise of a cave, when the sea of Togormo rolls before it," it will probably be admitted, is an image very natural and obvious to an inhabitant of the western coast of Scotland, where this grand feature of nature is so frequently exhibited on

the most magnificent scale. But, according to Mr Laing, Ossian must have borrowed it from Milton's

-----“ When hollow rocks retain  
 “ The sound of blustering winds, which, all night long,  
 “ Had raised the sea.”---

A very slight analysis will satisfy us, that the learned gentleman has been peculiarly unfortunate in this example of imitation. In Ossian, it is evidently *the reverberation of the roaring of the waves, from a cave on the shore*, which is spoken of; in Milton, it is *the sound of the winds retained in the cave itself*.

Another instance of classical imitation is given very pompously; “ that Ossian should “ compare the generations of men to leaves,” with Horace; or to “ the annual succession “ of leaves,” with Homer, is declared to be “ a supposition too gross for the most credulous to believe.”



Without recurring to the remarks, which I have formerly offered, and endeavoured to exemplify, on the frequency and apposite-ness of the maxims of the Highlanders, concerning the uncertainty of the condition of man in this world, (maxims probably derived from the philosophy of the Druids;) I shall only observe, that, to men, who are capable of the slightest reflection, the progress of human beings, from their birth to their death, cannot be more obviously or fitly suggested, than by images borrowed from the growth and decay of the subjects of the vegetable kingdom, which is, at all seasons, under our observation. Accordingly, we find, that images, derived from this source, have been adopted, and abound in the poetry of all nations. This imagery is far more ancient than Horace, and is to be met with in authors who had no communication with Homer. "Men," says the Psalmist, "are like grass that groweth up: in the morn-

“ing, it flourisheth, and groweth up; in the  
 “evening, it is cut down, and withereth.”\*  
 “As for man, his days are as grass, as a  
 “flower of the field, so he flourisheth; for  
 “the wind passeth over it, and it is gone,  
 “and the place thereof shall know it no  
 “more.” †

In the description of Swaran, “tall as a  
 “rock of ice, and his spear like a blasted  
 “pine,” Mr Laing recognizes Milton’s spear  
 of Satan,

“To equal which, the tallest pine,” &c.

Here, again, it would appear, that the learned gentleman has not attended to the well known principle, that all men are disposed to represent nature under the common aspect which she presents in every age and country. Pines grow still in Scot-

\* Psalm xc. ver. 5.

† Psalm ciii. ver. 15.

land, and they grew formerly in more abundance. Ossian had probably occasion to see taller pines than the Poet of England had ever beheld; but Milton's imagination was assisted by the description of "the cedars of Lebanon." When, therefore, they had occasion to describe an enormous length of spear, what was more natural, than that the one should borrow his image from the stateliest tree of which he had read, and the other, from the stateliest tree which he had seen?

It appears almost unnecessary to take notice of Mr Laing's parallel between the description of a battle in Ossian, and that of one in Pope's Homer. The only common traits that occur in these descriptions, anxiously marked in italics, are "echoing hills;" "streams pouring,"—in Ossian, "from the hills;" and, in Pope, "along the plain," and "roaring" as they pour. It is unnecessary here to enter into a physical argument

to prove, that, when sounds are emitted, hills, if they are near enough, must “echo;” that *streams*, in every age and country, “pour down from hills;” and that, as they “pour,” they *roar*.

Where, again I would ask, is the resemblance between the following sentences:—  
 “Cuchullin’s sword was like the beam of heaven, when it pierces the sons of the vale: the people are blasted, and fall, and all the hills are burning around;” and Pope’s

“Less loud the woods, when flames in torrents pour,  
 “Catch the dry mountain, and its shades devour?”

or Virgil’s

“*Ac veluti immissi diversis partibus ignes*  
 “*Arentem ad sylvam ?*”

Does not every one, who understands the languages in which these sentences are written, perceive, that Ossian’s is the compari-

son of a hero's sword to lightning, which is well known frequently to produce conflagration; whilst, in the two last, there is nothing of a sword, or lightning, but only of an ordinary conflagration?

The conformity of the imagery employed in describing Cuchullin's encounter with Swaran, and that of Milton's combat of Satan and Death, is adduced, by Mr Laing, as another proof of Ossian's plagiarism. Let any impartial reader compare the passages, and, if he can discover any other similarity, besides the comparison of the respective heroes to "two clouds," as Ossian has it, or to "two black clouds," as Milton, I shall, at least, yield up this instance. Mr Laing, I observe, would insinuate, by his italics, another point of resemblance:—Ossian, as before, compares his hero's sword to *lightning*; and Milton describes his *two black clouds* as "fraught with heaven's artillery." Is this imitation? Is it resemblance?

It is, I must confess, a very irksome task to pursue, through all their light shades, those empty phantoms of resemblance, which the learned gentleman conjures up to his exhibition, with such extreme facility. By this same method, any composition whatever may be assimilated to any other, without end; if a single expression, or image, however natural and obvious, occurring, in common, in different authors, be deemed sufficient to establish the charge of plagiarism.

“ *Weep* not on thy *rock* of roaring winds,  
“ O maid of Innistore,” is, with Mr Laing,

“ On Norway’s coasts, the widowed dame  
“ May wash the *rocks* with *tears*.”

Ossian’s “ bend thy fair head over the  
“ waves,” is,

“ May lang look o’er the seas.”

Surely the learned gentleman does not ima-

gine, that this will make any impression, or that it requires refutation.

Mr Laing (p. 424.) triumphs in “a singular detection.” In the episode of Cairbar and Brassolis, Mr Macpherson had translated, “Here rests their dust; and these two lonely yews sprung from their tombs, and wished to meet on high.” This, being reprobated by Dr Blair, was altered, it appears, into “the lonely yews sprung from their tombs to shade them from the storm.”

I have already shewn the futility of Mr Laing's argument to prove the non-existence of the yew-tree in Scotland; and, as to the alteration made, in the expression of this sentence, in a later edition, by Mr Macpherson, it is what may be very easily accounted for, if we consider, for a moment, the manner in which he, and Dr Smith, and indeed all collectors of poetry from oral tradition, not excepting Lycurgus himself, did, and

necessarily must, proceed in arranging the different recitations which they meet with.

I have seen an extract of a letter (as far as I recollect) of the late Reverend Mr Maclagan of Blair in Atholl, inserted by way of a note, on a page of one of the volumes of Duncan Kennedy's Collection of Gaelic Poetry, now in the possession of the Highland Society of Scotland, from which it appears, that Mr Macpherson possessed, at least, *three* different recited editions of one of the poems which he published; that he did not adhere implicitly to any one of them; but that, by exercising his taste and judgment, in selecting, and in arranging, he has presented an edition more perfect than any of them singly could have furnished. In the exercise of this judgment and taste, indeed, in selecting, and in arranging, I have always considered Mr Macpherson's chief merit to consist.

Dr Smith, too, in his Gleanings of Gaelic Poetry, *some* of which possess very high



merit, has avowedly pursued the same plan. He frequently suppresses passages ordinarily given in recitation; because he does not consider them as properly belonging to the poem, and subjoins them in a note, as in *Tiomna Ghuill*, p. 69. See also, pp. 232. 272. 309, &c. And, where he has occasion to hesitate, with regard to the preferable edition, he gives the one in the text, and the other in a note, as in p. 59. Besides, I observe, that, in almost every page of the *Seandana*, we have whole lines, at the bottom of the page, in the style of Bentley's *various readings*.

But I anticipate a subject, which will come to be considered afterwards, when I shall endeavour to shew, that, except *the seventh book of Temora*, and a few of the purer passages of Dr Smith's Collection, no part of Ossian's poetry, which has yet been presented to the public, is a fair object of criticism. The expressions, the imagery, and

even the sentiments, have undergone such a change, in the translations, that the genuine style of Ossian is not easily to be recognised.

“Crugal’s ghost of mist” is insinuated, by Mr Laing, to be the offspring of the shade of Patroclus, the “*ἦντε καπνος*” of Homer, with an acknowledged improvement. But this, the gentleman must be informed, is sacred ground. We, Highlanders, claim as extensive an acquaintance with the race of ghosts, as any persons whatever: we indeed claim, in them, an almost exclusive property. Nor is the construction of our ghosts less elegant than those of Homer. We, as well as he, believe them to be airy, unsubstantial forms, which sometimes render themselves visible, like mist, or the condensed breath of animals.

Of the allusions to *frost*, which occur in these Poems, I have taken notice already. “The heroes,” says Ossian, “stood on the heath, like oaks, with all their branches

“ round them, when they echo in the stream  
 “ of frost; and their withered branches are  
 “ rustling in the wind.”

The original of this is found, by Mr  
 Laing, in Milton's

—————“ Stood,  
 “ Their glory withered, as when Heaven's fire,”  
 &c.

—————“ Their stately growth  
 “ Stands on the blasted heath.”

And, again, Ossian has:—“ They stood like  
 “ a half-consumed grove of oaks, when we  
 “ see the sky through its branches, and the  
 “ meteor passing behind.” “ This,” says Mr  
 Laing, “ is Milton's

—————“ Satan alarmed,  
 “ Collecting all his might, dilated stood,  
 “ Like Teneriffè, or Atlas, unremoved;  
 “ His stature reached the sky, and on his crest  
 “ Sat horror plumed.”---

In order to refute the charge of plagia-  
 rism, in these instances, nothing further

seems requisite, than to place the passages beside each other, and to request the reader's attention to the alleged resemblance.

“Cuchullin stood before him, like a hill  
 “that catches the clouds of heaven; the  
 “winds contend on *its head of pines*; the  
 “hail rattles on its rocks: but firm, in its  
 “strength, it stands, and shades the vale of  
 “Cona.” This, with Mr Laing, is Virgil's

—————“*Horrendumque intonat armis,  
 “Quantus Athos, aut quantus Eryx, aut ipse coruscis,  
 “Cum fremit ilicibus quantus, gaudetque nivali  
 “Vertice, se attollens pater Appeninus ad auras.”\**

There are, indeed, in these passages, some slight shades of resemblance, such as must occur in the compositions of men of genius, describing natural scenes of the same kind; but these passages, at the same time, present strong lines of difference. In Virgil, a hero, rustling in his armour, is very well

\* Æn. lib. xii. v. 700.

compared to a mountain, resounding under the storm: in Ossian, again, we have an image, frequently employed by poets, of a hero, firm in his strength, like the hill that catches the clouds of heaven, and resists the hail rattling on its rocks.

“Perhaps the most egregious imitation,” says Mr Laing, “is that of Milton’s sun in an eclipse. Ossian has, ‘the darkened moon, when she moves in a dun circle, through the heavens, *and dreadful change is expected by men.*’ This,” says Mr Laing, “is Milton’s moon

“In dim eclipse,” (which) “with fear of change,  
“Perplexes monarchs.”

Surely Mr Laing is not ignorant, that all rude nations have entertained awful forebodings of evil, from the eclipses of the celestial luminaries. Some nations imagine, that, when the sun or moon are in eclipse, they are assailed by a hideous dragon; and they

beat drums and kettles, in order to terrify the monster. In all periods of rude society, these phenomena have been supposed to prognosticate the disasters of nations, and the downfall of empires. It would have been strange, if our Caledonian ancestors had affixed no such notions to those appearances.

The only other coincidence of Ossian with a classical writer, of which I shall take notice, is his comparison of a hero to “ a rock  
 “ in a sandy vale: the sea comes with its  
 “ waves, and roars against its hardened sides:  
 “ its head is covered with foam, the hills are  
 “ echoing around.” “ This,” says Mr Laing,  
 “ is Virgil’s

“ *Ille velut pelagi rupes immota resistit;*  
 “ *Ut pelagi rupes, magno veniente fragore*  
 “ *Quæ sese, multis circum latrantibus undis,*  
 “ *Mole tenet: Scopuli nequicquam et spumea circum*  
 “ *Saxa frenant.*”

It is wonderful, that Mr Laing should not have perceived, that this is a simile founded

on appearances so obvious and natural, that they must necessarily occur to all observers, who have had an opportunity of beholding them: and it may be remarked, that Ossian had, at least, as many opportunities of seeing a rock beat by the waves of the sea as Virgil. After all, the only common traits, in the two similes, are the "foam" and the "roaring of the waves."

## SECTION VII.

*Alleged Imitations of sacred Scripture considered.—  
Rhyme occurring in Ossian.—Proof of the Use  
of Rhyme, in Wales, before the Twelfth Cen-  
tury, from Giraldus Cambrensis.—Conclusion of  
Remarks on Mr Laing's Criticism.*

MR LAING, in proof of Mr Macpherson's being the author of these poems, has adduced a long list of supposed imitations of the style and imagery of sacred Scripture. And here, indeed, it must be acknowledged, that we find certain coincidences much more strongly marked than those which we have been lately considering. But is not this just what might have been expected,—that Ossian, living in an early period, and in a simple state of society, should abound in



that boldness of imagery, which particularly characterizes the earlier writers of every country? Dr Blair, who, it will probably be allowed, notwithstanding the sneer of Mr Laing,\* was as well entitled to lay down canons of criticism as any man, since the days of Quintilian, has observed, “that Oriental poetry might be termed, with the same propriety, Occidental, as it is characteristic rather of an age, than of a country, and, in some measure, belongs to all nations, in a rude and early state.” Hence, accordingly, it is, that, in figurativeness of expression, and abruptness of transition, the style of Ossian bears a greater affinity to that of Moses, and Solomon, and Homer, than to that of Virgil or Ovid.

It is on this principle, without having recourse to imitation, that we may easily account for the slight resemblance that is to

\* Page 409.

be found in the Queen of Sheba's address to Solomon, and Ossian's "Happy are thy people, O Fingal; thou art the first in their danger; the wisest in the days of their peace." The parallelisms, between some passages in the Song of Solomon and those cited from Ossian, are also striking, and one of them is pointed out by Mr Macpherson himself;—a certain indication of the light in which he considered them. But, if we examine these parallelisms attentively, we shall find, that they all consist of images borrowed from common and obvious objects; as, "the roe and the hart;" "the passing off of the storm, or of the winter, or of rain." Will any person say, that, because Solomon has employed these images, they could not occur to the poet of another country, not dissimilar to Palestine in its scenery, and in its natural productions? Must Ossian be charged with plagiarism, when he says, "I will bring thee to my father's house;" be-

cause Solomon had said, "I will bring thee  
"to my mother's house?" Because the King  
of Israel, in describing female beauty, se-  
lects those traits which, in every age, and  
in every country, have been deemed the  
constituents of beauty, must Ossian, if he  
pretends to speak of female loveliness, be of  
a different taste from Solomon, and Homer,  
and Anacreon, and make beauty consist in  
something else than what was ever account-  
ed beautiful before?

In the description of Cuchullin's car, Mr  
Laing recognizes Solomon's chariot, and  
Ovid's chariot of the sun. That the Cale-  
donians, of that period, had their cars, we  
know from the testimony of Greek and Ro-  
man history. But, I fancy, it will be a diffi-  
cult matter to identify Solomon's "bottom  
"of gold, his covering of purple, and paving  
"of love," with Ossian's "seat of bone, and  
"the bottom the footstool of heroes;" or  
that of Ovid's "golden pole, his chryso-

“lyths and gems,” with Ossian’s simple “beam of polished yew,” and embossment of “native stones.”

To call the grave “a house, or dwelling,” is, I believe, a metaphor to be found in all languages. It is called, in scripture, “the house appointed to all living.” Ossian’s “dark and narrow house”\* is, according to Mr Laing, “a transcript of this Scripture expression.” Had he consulted his classics, he might have found a much more apposite original in Horace’s “*Domus exilis Plutonia* ; † and, in the same passage, he might have seen how frequently common and obvious objects are described under the same images, by writers of very different ages and countries, without any possible ground to

\* The expression occurs in the original of the Seventh Book of Temora. It is, “*Tigh caol gun leus* ;”---that is, literally, “The narrow house without a torch.”

† Hor. Carm. lib. i. ode 4.---“The narrow house of Pluto.”

suspect that the one had imitated or copied the other. In the ode of Horace, which has been alluded to, we find *death*, just as in the style of Scripture, termed *night*; and the shortness of human life described in almost the same words with those of the Psalmist. The "*vitæ summa brevis*" of Horace, is the "few have the days of the years of my life been," of the patriarch Jacob, or the "thou hast made my days as an handbreadth," of King David. It were, indeed, an insult to the understanding of the reader to multiply examples of such coincidences of thought and imagery, which occur in writers, who could not possibly have had any mutual communication of ideas.

On this principle, I consider it as altogether unnecessary to enter into a more minute discussion of the other resemblances between certain passages of Scripture and certain passages of Ossian, where, indeed, amidst much dissimilarity, there are to be

found some ideas and terms which coincide; and I must again add, that, until we have the whole original of Ossian before us, as we have the Seventh Book of Temora, or, at least, a faithful and literal translation, we are not in a condition to institute a satisfactory comparison. Mr Macpherson, as I shall afterwards endeavour to shew, has, on many occasions, like other translators, adopted phrases, and turns of expression, which, from his acquaintance with the ancient classics, and particularly from his acquaintance with Scripture, (acquired, probably, as Mr Laing insinuates, during his studies in the Divinity Hall,) were familiar to his own mind. But are any of these phrases to be traced in Ossian? Are any of them to be found in the original of the Seventh Book of Temora? This will be seen in the sequel.

The imagery employed by Ossian, in describing the fall of Balclutha, is compared, by Mr Laing, with some descriptions of deso-

lation which occur in Scripture. But who does not perceive, that “thorns, and thistles, “and rank weeds, with the intrusions of the “fox, and other wild animals, on the desert- “ed dwelling,” must necessarily enter into the description of such a scene, to whatever age or country the poet may belong?

The last of Mr Laing's objections to the authenticity and antiquity of these Poems, which shall now be noticed, is expressed as follows: (p. 436.) “Rhyme,” says he, “is a “corruption of Greek and Latin poetry, first “introduced, on account of its extreme fa- “cility, into monkish verse; and adopted, “in Italian poetry, in the ninth century; “into Saxon, in the eleventh; and into “Scandinavian poetry, in the beginning of “the thirteenth century. In Welsh poetry, “it was unknown to Giraldus Cambrensis, “in the twelfth century. The introduction “of Rhymes, in Ossian, five hundred years “before they were known in Europe, and

“ one thousand years before they were used  
 “ in Wales, is alone a detection.”

This objection, were it enforced by adequate proofs, would, no doubt, have very great weight. It had been obliging, however, if the learned gentleman had directed his readers to the precise passage, in which Giraldus asserts, that rhymes were unknown in Wales in the twelfth century. I have searched, in vain, for any which can, by the most remote implication, be understood to convey such an idea. But, unfortunately for Mr Laing's argument, there occurs a well known passage, in which Giraldus expressly affirms, that the Welsh excelled in rhymes :—“ *In cantilenis rythmicis, et dictamine, tam subtiles inveniuntur, ut miræ et exquisitæ inventionis, tam verborum, quam sententiarum proferant exornationes; unde et poetas (quos Bardos vocant) ad hoc deputatos multos invenias.*”\*

\* Cambriæ Descriptio, c. xii.



That is:—" They are found so polished in  
" rhyming ditties,† and in expression, that  
" they produce beauties of words and senti-  
" ment, of wonderful and exquisite inven-  
" tion; whence you may find poets *amongst*  
" *them* (whom they call Bards) appointed for  
" this purpose."

The passage is important; it shews not only how unfounded is the assertion of Mr Laing, but that, from the nicety (*subtiles*) and perfection to which the Welsh had, in the days of Giraldus, carried the invention of rhyme, its use amongst them must necessarily have been of great antiquity. Indeed, were this the proper place for such a disquisition, it might not be difficult to shew, that rhyme had its first origin amongst the nations of Celtic stock. When we consider the ac-

† It is admitted by a learned journalist, (Edinburgh Review, No. VII. p. 206.) that *rythmicis* is the adjective agreeing with *cantilenis*.

count of Cæsar and of Mela, already cited,—  
“ that the disciples of the Druids, during a  
“ course of study, which sometimes was  
“ continued for twenty years, learned a vast  
“ number of verses, which they committed  
“ to memory,”—it appears highly probable,  
at least, that, in order to facilitate the reten-  
tion of such a mass of verse, they found it  
necessary to have recourse to rhyme,—an in-  
vention evidently calculated to ease the la-  
bours, and to promote the accuracy, of the  
Bardic recitations.

I have now done with my observations on  
the criticisms of Mr Laing. I hope that on  
no occasion, in considering his arguments,  
have I said any thing inconsistent with the  
respect which I bear to his abilities, and to  
his honourable profession. Mr Laing depre-  
cates abuse: I trust, that I shall not be  
deemed to have given him any. But I can-

not help expressing something more than regret, when he allows so many intemperate expressions to escape himself, in speaking of such respectable characters as Dr Blair, Lord Kames, Dr Smith, &c. Speaking of those gentlemen of the Highlands, “who have attested the authenticity of Mr Macpherson’s translations,” he says, “had Mr Macpherson, instead of an epic poem, proclaimed the discovery of a new Gospel, I verily believe, he would have obtained the same attestations.” I must beg leave to tell Mr Laing, in return to the indecent flippancy of this remark, that there are, in the Highlands of Scotland, persons who, whilst they believe the poems ascribed to Ossian to be ancient and authentic, are able also to form a proper estimate of the infinitely more important objects of their religious faith; and who, whilst they can innocently amuse themselves in perusing a page of Homer or of

Ossian, with as much taste as the learned gentleman, know, and value, the Sacred Volume too highly “ to receive *another Gospel*, “ though it were preached to them by an “ angel from heaven.”

## SECTION VIII.

*Estimate of the different Collections of Gaelic Poetry, which have been made,—by Mr Jerome Stone, Mr Duncan Kennedy, and Dr John Smith.*

IT would seem, that there is no method better calculated to elucidate the subject of the authenticity of these poems, than a particular enquiry into the manner in which the different collections of them have been conducted and given to the world. Of these collections, that of Mr Macpherson undoubtedly claims our principal attention; but it is not foreign to our argument to notice, shortly, those of Mr Stone, Dr Smith, and Mr Kennedy.

## I. JEROME STONE.

Mr Jerome Stone, formerly, I believe, a schoolmaster at Dunkeld, seems to have been the first, who drew the attention of the public to the ancient poetry of the Highlands. In 1756, he published, in the Scots Magazine, a translation, in verse, of *Bas Fhraoich*, (the Death of Fraoch,) under the title of Albin and Mey. The original appears to be a poem of very great antiquity; and possesses much merit and interest. It is given, by Mr Mackenzie, in the Appendix to the *Report* of the Committee, (p. 99.) with Stone's version, and a literal one subjoined, in thirty-three stanzas of four lines each. Mr Mackenzie has given it from Mr Stone's own copy, which he procured, with some trouble, from Mr Chalmers of London. It approaches nearer to the style of the Gaelic

fragments of Ossian, that are before the public, than any thing I have yet met with.

With regard to this poem, I have to mention, as an additional proof of the actual transmission of very ancient Gaelic poetry, by oral tradition, through a long period of time, that there is an old woman, now alive, and residing at Kirktown of Aberfoyle, Sarah Maclachlane, a native of Ardgour, in Lochaber, who lately repeated to me this long poem, as given by Mr Mackenzie, verse for verse, with the exception of the transposition of a few stanzas; but with the omission of none. She can repeat no other ancient Gaelic poem; but is well acquainted with the historical tradition of the burning of Taura, the palace of Fingal, with all the wives of the Fingallians; a story which forms the subject of one of the poems given in Dr Smith's Collection, entitled *Losga Taura*.

Though Mr Macpherson be the next, in

point of time, and by far the most eminent in the importance of his collections, it seems more convenient, reserving the consideration of his Ossian till the last, to discuss the merits of the inferior collections of Dr Smith, and of Mr Kennedy.

## II. DUNCAN KENNEDY.

Of these two gentlemen, Mr Kennedy, formerly a schoolmaster in Argyleshire, now an accountant in Glasgow, appears to have begun to collect Gaelic poetry first; that is, somewhat prior to the year 1780. He has given an account of the names and residence of the persons, from whose oral recitation he collected these poems, which is published in the Appendix to the Committee's Report, No. xvi. Art. 2.

His collection consists of three thin folio volumes, in manuscript, which were purchased, some years ago, by the Highland Society



of Scotland, and are now in the possession of the Society. I have seen them, a few years ago, by the favour of Mr Mackenzie, in the hands of the late Dr Donald Smith.

As the share which it appears Mr Kennedy had in framing that collection is no longer a secret, and especially as his pretensions, on this occasion, have, with those to whom they are yet unexplained, tended to confirm their scepticism, on the subject of Ossian's Poems, I consider it as my duty to investigate this point minutely, and, at the same time, with the utmost impartiality.

In October 1805, an opportunity occurred to me of opening a correspondence with Mr Kennedy, on the subject of Ossian's Poems, of which I shall now give a faithful account.

In return to his letter, of October 18. 1805, in which he obligingly expresses "his  
"readiness to answer any queries which I  
"might propose to him on the subject," I

wrote to him, and pointed out to him a passage in one of Dr Smith's letters to Mr Mackenzie, which is as follows:—" I have to mention," says Dr Smith, " that, on my observing the beauty of one or two passages of these poems, the person who gave it me (Mr Kennedy) said, *these were of his own composition*. This assertion I then placed to the account of his vanity; but I think it right to state it to you as I had it, and leave you to think of it as you please."\*

I then proceeded to state, to Mr Kennedy, how much it concerned his honour to take notice of this charge; at the same time, strongly expressing my suspicions, that it was, in some measure, well founded; that I did not consider it as improbable, that he, versed from his earliest years in the traditional poetry of his country, and smitten with the love of ancient

\* Report of the Committee, App. p. 89.

“ song, might have been tempted, in the ar-  
“ dour of youthful fancy, to imitate Ossian,  
“ and to add his own compositions to the  
“ collection; that, if this was indeed the  
“ case, as I suspected it to be, it was far  
“ more honourable for himself, and even  
“ highly proper, in the present state of men’s  
“ minds on this subject, to come forward,  
“ and make a fair acknowledgment of the  
“ share which he had in the business, of  
“ which I engaged myself to be the vehicle  
“ to the public.”

Mr Kennedy, in a letter of the 25th Oc-  
tober, 1805, consisting of fourteen pages  
folio, and containing much extraneous mat-  
ter, which it does not appear necessary, at  
present, to adduce, writes:—“ I have still  
“ my fears, that it will lead both parties,  
“ engaged in this controversy, into a dread-  
“ ful warfare; and that it will give grounds  
“ to critics and sceptics to cavil, and will  
“ confirm, in part, what they have, for many

“ years, laboured to prove, and to admit,  
 “ that Dr Smith has told the truth, when  
 “ he avers, ‘ that both are partly in the right,  
 “ and partly in the wrong.’ But the mate-  
 “ rial fact ought and will be supported, ‘ that  
 “ Fingal fought, and Ossian sung;’ and that  
 “ the latter has immortalized the fame of his  
 “ father, and of the seven legions, or batta-  
 “ lions, (*seachd cathain na Feinne,*) who  
 “ fought many battles under his sun-beam,  
 “ or *gile-greine*.

“ As the rage of both parties must soon  
 “ subside, a fair division of property ought  
 “ to take place, and poetical justice distri-  
 “ buted between Ossian and the fabrica-  
 “ tors. It will, therefore, be admitted, at  
 “ least by me, that Macpherson has inter-  
 “ polated;\* that Smith has composed; and

\* “ That *Macpherson* has interpolated” is only a mat-  
 ter of opinion; and the public will judge how far Mr  
 Kennedy’s opinion should weigh in this matter. Of  
 what *Dr Smith* has done, perhaps he knew something:

“ that Kennedy, with much reluctance, is  
“ forced to come forward and confess, that  
“ he has ventured to make some verses,  
“ which perhaps his vanity may deceive  
“ him,\* but he is inclined to think, ap-  
“ proach the nearest to the genuine strains  
“ of Ossian that have yet been produced in  
“ the Gaelic language.

“ Want of time will not, at present, per-  
“ mit me to answer your long and polite  
“ letter further, than to glance over it, and  
“ to reply to the few queries which you have  
“ put to me. The first being, ‘ How far did  
“ Dr Smith fabricate the poems which he  
“ published under the title of *Scandana*?’ If  
“ you will have the goodness to send me  
“ the copy you have of what he calls *Sean-*

of what he has done *himself*, he has not formed a just estimate.

\* It will be seen, in the sequel, with what justice Mr Kennedy has formed this estimate of his own poetical powers.

“ *dana*, composed by Ossian, Orran, Ullin,  
“ &c. I will, in so far as I am able to judge,  
“ point out to you, distinctly, what of them  
“ are Ossian’s, what I believe to be the Doc-  
“ tor’s, and what are mine, on the margin,  
“ and return it to you in a fortnight, through  
“ any conveyance you please to direct.\* It  
“ is difficult to discriminate the composi-  
“ tions of the different composers any other  
“ way distinctly, especially since I want my  
“ poems, and have forgot the most of them.  
“ I should indeed be glad to have a peru-

\* I have to observe, that I did send my copy of the *Seandana* to Mr Kennedy, within ten days of his writing; but so far has he departed from his promise, that I got it out of his hands, only a few months ago, after repeated applications. And, after he had retained it for more than a year, I find it defaced about half way through the volume, with certain dots and marks on the margin, to which, it appears, that he had added a key, on a blank leaf of the book. But this he cut out, before he returned it. What may have been Mr Kennedy’s motives in all this, I cannot guess, nor is it of much importance to enquire.

“ sal of the three manuscripts, given to the  
“ Highland Society, to enable me to quote  
“ off every stanza composed by myself;† as  
“ otherwise, after a lapse of more than twen-  
“ ty years, I cannot be correct. I think I  
“ do not exaggerate, in supposing, that I  
“ have composed about a sixth or a seventh  
“ part of what these manuscripts contain.  
“ The rest I certainly believe to belong to  
“ Ossian, and the other Fingallian Bards,  
“ and were picked up by me, from oral tra-  
“ dition, from the persons mentioned in my  
“ report to the Society.

“ I hope,” adds Mr Kennedy, “ you will  
“ not form the same opinion of me, in de-  
“ claring myself a piece of a poet, that Dr  
“ Smith has done, or when I, on honour, as-  
“ sure you, that the Death of Carril is en-

† This opportunity Mr Kennedy enjoyed, in 1806; having been examined on the subject before a Committee of the Highland Society, to whom he gave an account, in writing, of every line to which he lays claim.

“ tirely my own, which I composed from  
“ the story related to me, as annexed to the  
“ poem. The most of Bas Ossian I also  
“ claim; and considerable portions of the  
“ Death of Diarmid, Goll, Oscair, Garbh,  
“ Latha na Leana, Liur, &c. &c. The most  
“ of these additions Dr Smith has never  
“ seen, being composed in the spring of 1785,  
“ some years after his translations had been  
“ published.

“ ‘The genuine poetry of Ossian,’ says Mr  
Kennedy, “ is, perhaps, inimitable; but still  
“ a good Gaelic scholar, of a good ear, and  
“ well acquainted with his imagery, and the  
“ qualifications and names of his favourite  
“ heroes, and professed enemies, may com-  
“ pose verses approximate to the excellence  
“ of the original, and which not one in a  
“ thousand will be able to distinguish from  
“ the real. It is this that has given rise  
“ to so much dispute, and been productive  
“ of so many fabrications.”



Such are the confessions of Mr Kennedy, a gentleman, beyond question, well versed in the Gaelic language, and whose idiom was never contaminated by any other language than the English. These confessions he has repeated, with additions, in his examination before a Committee of the Highland Society of Scotland.

The confessions of Mr Kennedy, it must be acknowledged, appear, at first sight, to furnish a strong presumption, that much of the poetry, which has been ascribed to Ossian, is also a modern fabrication. If Mr Kennedy can compose poetry, which, to use his own expression, “not one in a thousand” will be able to distinguish from the real strains of Ossian, why might not Mr Macpherson, a man of far higher acquirements, do the same?

That Mr Kennedy, by interspersing, amongst his own compositions, some verses

and phrases, borrowed from truly ancient and genuine poetry, with which it appears his memory was stored, may have produced pieces, in which there now and then occur a few truly Ossianic verses and expressions, is not denied; and it is possible, that he may not himself have been conscious of the plagiarism which he committed. But that, besides this *occasional* merit, the poems, which he has now claimed as his, possess any thing else, which might “approximate” them, in the slightest degree, to the Ossianic poetry, translated by Mr Macpherson, will be maintained only by the self-complacency of the author. I must add, that the entire failure of Mr Kennedy, in imitating the strains of Ossian, affords the most complete example, that could be adduced, of the insuperable difficulty of rivalling the Caledonian bard. It is a very easy matter for Mr Kennedy, or for any man, to say, “I have invoked

“ the spirit of Ossian ; I have been heard,  
“ and inspired.” This is just Owen Glen-  
dower's

“ *I can call* spirits from the vasty deep.”

“ Why, so can I,” (says Hotspur,) “ or so can any man ;  
“ But will they come when you do call for them?” †

Concerning the answer to Mr Kennedy's invocation, let us now enquire. I shall take the two first pieces, which he claims in his letter, Carril and Bas Ossian, which, besides being the first in the order of the author, are probably also the highest in merit, from the circumstance of their having been selected by the learned Chairman of the Society's Committee, in his report, as specimens of Mr Kennedy's Collection. As this is a point of much consequence to our argument, it is proposed to enter into a short analysis of these pieces.

† Shakespeare's Henry IV. act iii. scene 1.

1. *Mr Kennedy's Poem of Carril.*

With regard to the poem of Carril,\* Mr Mackenzie observes, “that, with a simplicity bordering upon rudeness, it is extremely striking in the Gaelic; but very difficult to be translated. It is given entire,” adds he, “in the Appendix, No. 22, in Kennedy’s own orthography, and with the preamble, or argument, with which he accompanied the copy he sent to the Committee, literally given. From the first, the Gaelic scholar may form an opinion of the collection; from the second, the English reader may estimate the literary abilities of the collector.”

I may be permitted to observe, that the learned reporter has judged well. This poem, with its argument, appears to furnish a very

\* See Report, App. p. 336.

just criterion, by which we may judge of Mr Kennedy's powers. Of the argument, I shall say nothing; perhaps the extracts, which have been given of his letters, may suffice on this head.

As to Mr Kennedy's original Gaelic, it will not be difficult to prove, that it bears upon itself the manifest stamp of modern composition. The character of modern Gaelic poetry is well enough known. To pile up a string of epithets; to range, in succession, a row of adjectives, or verbs, of nearly synonymous import, constitutes, in the taste and judgment of our modern composers, the perfection of Gaelic song. It is not one line only, which is occupied with this unmeaning amplification; but the

*“ Monstrum horrendum, informe, ingens,”*

stalks along through whole quatrains. I refer, for examples, which it were needless here to adduce, to all the late collections of

Gaelic poems and songs, from Macdonald's to Macintyre's, not excepting the modern parts of Gillies' Perth Collection. This *falsetto* in style, so totally unknown in the genuine strains of Ossian, is the characteristic of modern Gaelic poetry; and it is the character of the "Death of Carril," and, in a great measure, of "the Death of Ossian;" the former of which Mr Kennedy, in his letter, claims *entirely* as his; and the latter, in the *greatest part*.

As an instance of Mr Kennedy's (probably unconscious) plagiarism, I observe, in the third stanza of Carril,

" *Clachan agus talamh trom,  
" Threachailte le 'm buinn le stri;*"

That is,

" Stones and heavy earth  
" Were dug up by their heels in strife."

Almost the very same words occur in a

poem of unquestionable antiquity, the “Fi-  
“onn and Manos” of the Perth Collection,  
p. 23., and in the copy I took down of R.  
Macneill’s recitation of the same poem. In  
these last, it is,

“ *Bha clachan agus talamh trom,*  
“ *Mosgladh fuidh spairn an cos;*”

That is,

“ Stones and heavy earth  
“ Were moved under the strife of their feet.”

This single instance may furnish a key to Mr Kennedy’s imitations of Ossian. Wherever a line, or an expression, of any merit occurs, it may be easily traced to originals of real antiquity, to which Mr Kennedy is no stranger. But, wherever he appears as an original, he betrays, at once, the character of the Gaelic poetry of the eighteenth century.

Thus, we have,

St. 5. " They twined, and pulled, and drew." \*

Again :

- St. 7. " Carril, mild, brave, and elegant,  
 " Fell breathless under the press of valour ;  
 " Mischievous, ruinous, barbarous was the stroke."  
 8. " My darling, my child, my love !"  
 9. " O Carril, my son, my delight !"  
 13. " Chearful, courageous, and merry,  
 " Wast thou in Teamhra, (Temora,) amongst hun-  
 dreds."  
 18. " The hero, vigorous, strong, and tall,  
 " Is without motion, arms, or dress."  
 20. " Hero, mild, chearful, affectionate,  
 " Eloquent, strong, active, wounding ;" (or skilled  
 to wound.)

It is presumed, that the simple exhibition of these verses will satisfy every person, who has felt and admired the beauties of Mr Mac-

\* I do not adopt Dr Donald Smith's translation in the Report; it appears to be somewhat ornamented. I translate literally and faithfully.



pherson's translations, of the incalculable inferiority of these imitations, if imitations they can be called.

2. *The Death of Ossian, by Mr Kennedy.*

Of the "Death of Ossian," a large extract is given, by the Committee, in the Appendix, No. 20. with this remark, "That it is a beautiful and affecting poem; but debased by a pretty long passage, which seems evidently an interpolation, containing a piece of ribaldry, put into the mouth of Connar's wife." Taking into account the probability, that *this* interpolation, so judiciously rejected by the Committee, is the production of Mr Kennedy, I must observe, that the greatest part of the specimen of this poem, given in the Report, bears undoubted marks of antiquity; and to this it is presumed, that Mr Kennedy will lay no claim.

The introduction is precisely the same with that of Dr Smith's Diarmid :

Smith. “ *Cia tiamhaidh thu n’ochd a ghleann Caothan,*  
 “ *Gun ghuth gaothair thu, ’s ’gun cheol !*”

Kennedy. “ *’S tiamhaidh bhí nochd ann gleann Caothan,*  
 “ *Gun ghuth gaidhir ann, gun cheol !*”

That is,

“ How mournful to-night is the vale of Cona,  
 “ Without voice of hound, and without music !”

Will Mr Kennedy say, that this, and the bulk of the remaining part of this specimen, is his ? Let it be remembered, that, in his letter to me, cited above, he says, “ that  
 “ most of these additions (*i. e.* Carril, the  
 “ Death of Ossian, &c.) Dr Smith had never  
 “ seen, being composed in spring 1785,  
 “ some years after his (Dr Smith’s) translations had been published.” But, if Dr Smith had never seen them, it was impos-

sible that he could have borrowed from them. The coincidence can only be accounted for, by allowing, that both have derived these verses from tradition.

Still, however, it must be remarked, that, even in these verses from "Bas Ossian," Mr Kennedy appears to have some claims, sufficiently marked by a modern hand. He appears to have debased this passage, by several interpolations, which declare their author, by the same false taste that reigns throughout his Carril. He introduces the heroes

"Musical, elegant, comely, brave,  
"With wine, and conversation, and flesh :  
"Esteemed enough; and we knew not falsehood.  
"The heroes mild, brave, friendly,  
"Of much kindness; and extensive was their fame,  
"Generosity, hospitality," &c.

Now, let any person thus take, at random, six verses, from the original of the Seventh Book of Temora, and translate it literally, or freely, at his pleasure, if he can

produce so bald a piece of poetry, as the above, I shall allow, that Mr Kennedy can imitate Ossian with some effect. But I think it will be granted, by every person of just taste, that the specimens adduced are

-----“ No more like Ossian,  
“ Than I to Hercules.”

### III. DR SMITH.

Dr John Smith, now Minister of the Gospel at Campbelton, a gentleman well known to the public for his worth, erudition, and knowledge of the Gaelic language, appears to have been employed in collecting the ancient poetry of the Highlands nearly about the same time with Mr Kennedy. He had the use of Mr Kennedy's manuscripts; and there is reason to believe, that he transcribed from them, into his own collection, whatever he conceived to possess merit. In 1780,

Dr Smith gave this collection to the public, in a translation; and, in 1787, he published the originals of these translations, in an octavo volume of 348 pages, under the title of *Seandana*. It is important, however, to observe, that Mr Kennedy, in his letter above cited, declares, with regard to his manuscripts, now in the hands of the Highland Society, "That Dr Smith had never seen the "most of the additions," (in which he claims a property,) "having been composed in "spring 1785, some years after Dr Smith's "translations had been published."

Mr Kennedy has, in his letter, directly charged Dr Smith as *the composer* of a part, at least, of the *Seandana*; and Mr Kennedy himself, having avowed the share which he has had in the fabrication of his own collection, the charge has, in the minds of many,\*

\* See Mr Laing's Dissertation, and Edinburgh Review, No. XII. Art. 15.

seemed to receive considerable confirmation.

What share Dr Smith may have had in this business, I shall not presume to say. Entertaining, as I do, and have always done, the highest respect for his well known abilities and virtues, I took the liberty (24th March, 1806,) of addressing him upon the subject;—"Intimating to him my intention " to publish on the question; and stating to " him the confessions of Mr Kennedy; his " charge against Dr Smith of similar fabri- " cation; and his voluntary promise of mark- " ing, on the margin of my copy of the Se- " andana, what he believed to be Ossian's, " what he believed to be Dr Smith's, and " what was his own. I suggested, that, as " the name of Dr Smith must always hold a " respectable rank in the discussion of this " question, I should be unavoidably led to " introduce it; and requested, with as much " delicacy as I could, that he would have

“ the goodness to point out to me the manner in which I might do so without offence.”

Whilst I cannot help regretting, that the reverend gentleman declines taking any share in this dispute, I hope he will forgive me for giving to the public his letter, which I had in return to my application: it will be found replete with good sense; and it suggests a very obvious criterion, by which we may judge of the pretended imitations of Mr Kennedy, or of any other person whatever.

Campbelton, 28th April, 1806.

“ REVEREND SIR,

“ ON the subject of your letter, which I have but now received, I have long ago said all I have to say, and take no further concern in the question. If any allege he passed on me as ancient poetry what was his own composition, I have no interest in disputing his allegation. *If*

*I had, I would try if he could write such verses as he claims, (no doubt the best,) on any other given subject ; and examine whether these passages were not furnished by a dozen or score of other contributors.* Unfortunately for me, not only one, but every contributor, dead or alive, must renounce his right, before I can take the merit of a verse or line, if vanity do not prompt me to take the contribution of such as are dead, and unable to dispute my claim. But this, I think, I shall leave to others ; and, if they claim the translation, as well as the original, I will not dispute it, nor care who may believe, and who may doubt. The stopping of my plough, by a shower of rain, now coming on, gives me more concern than either. I am glad, however, that you find amusement in what once amused myself.—I am, Reverend Sir,

Your most obedient humble servant,

(Signed) JOHN SMITH."

DR GRAHAM, Aberfoyle.



The reverend gentleman having thus abandoned his publications on this subject with such complete indifference, it now appears the less necessary to be scrupulous in analysing their merits. It is well known, that Dr Smith's collections of Gaelic poetry met with little notice from the public, either in the original, or in the translation. He speaks feelingly, on this subject, in one of his letters to Mr Mackenzie:—"The (supposed) "profits," he says, "of his publication, were "only a serious loss. I could never since," he adds, "think of Gaelic poetry with pleasure, or with patience, except to wish it "had been dead before I was born."

It must, at the same time, be observed, that, notwithstanding the great neglect with which the public has, from the beginning, treated the collections of Dr Smith, they unquestionably contain many morsels of the most exquisite poetry,—pieces as beautiful, as perfect, and as sublime, as any that

have ever passed through Mr Macpherson's hands. Of this, besides the examples which have been already adduced, others will be brought in the course of this enquiry.

Whence is it, then, it will naturally be asked, that the Ossianic poetry, given by Mr Macpherson, has been so universally admired; that it has passed through so many editions; and been translated into so many foreign languages; whilst that published by Dr Smith, which exhibits, *from time to time*, compositions of a similar strain, and *frequently* of equal merit, are, in a great measure, unknown and neglected?

There are *two* circumstances attending the collections of Dr Smith, which, it is presumed, will sufficiently account for the fate which they have experienced.

1. Dr Smith, on all occasions, translates in a careless and slovenly manner; whilst Mr Macpherson, though sometimes, as shall

be shewn, he translates falsely, and often engrafts his own bombastic phrases on the simplicity of Ossian, yet adheres closely, for the most part, to his original, and often imitates its sententious brevity with singular success. A few examples of Dr Smith's manner of translating will, it is hoped, place this subject in a just point of view.

A beautiful passage, from the Death of Diarmad, is, literally, as follows:—A husband, lamenting over his deceased wife, says,

- “ Lasting was our abode together,  
 “ During two generations, that departed like the leaves.  
 “ The sapling, that the foot would have crushed,  
 “ Have we beheld, with age, decaying;  
 “ Streams shifting their channels;  
 “ Nettles in the abode of mighty kings:  
 “ Great was our joy; our days were happy;  
 “ *To us*, the winter was not cold, or the night dark:  
 “ Minella was a light that did not wane:  
 “ But that ray is now departed.” \*

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\* Seandana, p. 104.

This passage Dr Smith thus translates, or rather paraphrases : †

“ Many were our days on the heath : we  
“ have seen one race, like the leaf of autumn,  
“ pass ; we have seen another lift, in its  
“ place, its green head, and grow old ; we  
“ have turned away our foot from trees, lest  
“ we should crush them in youth, and we  
“ have seen them again decay with years ;  
“ we have seen streams change their course,  
“ and nettles growing where feasted kings.  
“ All this while, our joy remained, our days  
“ were glad. The winter, with all its snow,  
“ was warm ; the night, with all its clouds,  
“ was bright. The face of Minalla was a  
“ light which never knew a wane, an unde-  
“ caying beam around my steps ; but now  
“ she shines on other lands. When, my  
“ love, shall I be with you ? ”

† Gaelic Antiquities, p. 191.

Again, on the Death of Armor, in Dan an Deirg,\* it is, literally,

- “ I behold thy father, under his load of years,  
 “ In vain expecting thy arrival ;  
 “ His trembling hand on his spear,  
 “ And his gray, bald, head, like the aspin in the storm.  
 “ Every cloud deceives his dim eye,  
 “ As he expects to see thy bark.  
 “ A gleam of the sun comes across his aged countenance,  
 “ And he cries out to the youth, ‘ I behold the vessel!’  
 “ The children look out towards the main ;  
 “ They see the mist sailing *along*.  
 “ He shakes his gray head,  
 “ His sigh is sad, his visage mournful.  
     “ I behold Crimina, with a faint smile,  
 “ Imagining, *in her dream*, that she sees him on the shore.  
 “ Her lips, in her slumbers, salute thee ;  
 “ And with joyful arms she embraces thee.  
 “ Ah! young woman, vain is thy dream,  
 “ The noble *hero* no more shalt thou behold :  
 “ Far from his home fell thy love ;  
 “ In Innisfail tarnished is his beauty.  
 “ Thou shalt awaken, Crimina,  
 “ And shalt see that thy dream is deceitful.

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\* Seandana, p. 23.

“ But when shall he awake from his slumber ?  
 “ Or when shall the sleep of the grave terminate ? ”

This affecting passage, abounding in truly Ossianic imagery and expression, Dr Smith thus translates : †

“ I see his father bending under the load  
 “ of years ; his hand trembles on the point-  
 “ less spear, and his head, with its few gray  
 “ hairs, shakes like the aspen leaf. Every  
 “ distant cloud deceives his dim eye, as he  
 “ looks in vain for thy bounding ship. Joy,  
 “ like a sun-beam on the blasted heath, tra-  
 “ vels over his face of age, as he cries to the  
 “ children at their play, ‘ I behold it coming !’  
 “ They turn their eye to the blue wave, and  
 “ tell him they see but the sailing mist.  
 “ He shakes, with a sigh, his gray head, and  
 “ the cloud of his face is mournful. I see  
 “ Crimoina smiling, in her morning dream ;  
 “ she thinks thou dost arrive in all thy

† Gaelic Antiq. p. 111.

“stately beauty; her lips, in half-formed  
 “words, hail thee in her dream, and her  
 “joyful arms are spread to clasp thee. But  
 “alas, Crimoina, thou only dreamest. Thy  
 ‘love is fallen, never more shall he tread the  
 “shore of his native land. In the dust of  
 “Inisfail his beauty sleeps. Thou shalt  
 “awake from thy slumber, Crimoina, to  
 “know it. But when shall Armor awake  
 “from his long sleep? When shall the heavy  
 “slumber of the tenant of the tomb be end-  
 “ed?”

I shall add only one other short example of Dr Smith's mode of translating.

In the *Seandana*, p. 112, we have, literally,

“I will not listen to the song of the thrush,  
 “In the fine morning of the first season, (*i. e.* May.)

Dr Smith translates, (p. 197.)

“It (*i. e.* my grief,) will not listen to all  
 “the larks that soar in the lowly vale, when

“ the dewy plains rejoice in the morning of  
“ summer.”

It were easy to multiply instances of the loose and paraphrastic manner in which Dr Smith translates these fragments: they occur in every page; and it is not wonderful, that, in such translations, the public has not recognized the spirit of Ossian. But, I observe,

2. That the great and leading circumstance, in the general neglect which this collection has experienced, is, that, with many fragments of unquestionable beauty and merit, and which bear upon them the genuine stamp of antiquity, the volume consists, in a great measure, of modern fabrications and interpolations. I shall not attempt to say in what manner, or by what persons, these have been introduced. Perhaps it may be enough to call to recollection the well-known and acknowledged circumstance, that Dr



Smith borrowed a great proportion of his collection from Mr Kennedy's manuscripts, such, at least, as they were prior to 1785, when, as in their last stage, they were, no doubt, filled with much of his own spurious verse. It is also not improbable, were we warranted to judge from Dr Smith's translations, that he may have been led to determine hastily, concerning the merits of some of the poems which he has published; and, regulating our opinion by the same criterion, it seems almost certain, that he has seldom employed the same labour, and judgment, and taste, in arranging his editions of these poems, as Mr Macpherson appears almost always to have done.

Be this as it may, it is undeniable, that though there are fragments, of the greatest beauty and elegance, to be met with, *occasionally*, in this collection, the poems are, upon the whole, of such unequal merit; and the incongruous shreds of ancient and mo-

dern composition are so clumsily patched together, that no person can, with patience, peruse any one of them from the beginning to the end.

Considering the great merit of *many passages* in the Seandana, and no doubt, too, of *some passages* in Mr Kennedy's manuscripts, it may be permitted to remark, by the way, that it were worth while to purge the volume of the interpolations of modern fabricators, and to preserve only what appears, on good grounds, to be unquestionably ancient. Nor would this be a very difficult task. Mr Kennedy has already given a pretty sufficient key to what he claims as his; and it would not be difficult, with the exercise of a little critical acumen, (could one resolve to wade through this volume,) to assign to every other modern his proper share. It is true, the volume would be reduced, by this refining process, by more than one-half of its contents; but the remainder, accom-

panied by a faithful translation, would be found to be of sterling value.

Thus we are enabled, in some degree, to form an estimate of the part which has been taken by the only collectors of Gaelic poetry, besides Mr Macpherson, whose names have obtained any celebrity in this question. What Mr Kennedy claims, so far as the justice of his claims can be ascertained, is, compared with what Mr Macpherson has produced, the very bathos of Gaelic poetry. Dr Smith's volume, notwithstanding many exquisite reliques of ancient poetry, which it undoubtedly contains, is, from some cause or other, † nearly intolerable. And now, with regard to Mr Macpherson, the most respectable evidence can be adduced of his comparative ignorance of the Gaelic lan-

† One of these causes we are enabled to ascertain,---his hasty adoption of the materials of Mr Kennedy's manuscripts.

guage. In his knowledge of the idiom of this tongue, he appears to have been far inferior to Dr Smith, and even to Mr Kennedy, the author of *Carril*; and yet we have, through the hands of Mr Macpherson, besides some smaller fragments of Gaelic poetry, the whole of the Seventh Book of *Temora* (as he has chosen to denominate that poem) in the original, consisting of four hundred and twenty-three lines, in a style of classical chasteness, of elegant and harmonious versification, and of sublime sentiment and imagery, which boldly challenges the keenest eye of criticism. This precious fragment of Ossianic verse, whilst it may be truly considered as inferior only to a book of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey*, is, in our present circumstances, with regard to the originals, almost the only portion of this ancient poetry which is a fair object of critical investigation.

To developé this part of the argument, so important in the present question, and to

state, as far as it is now practicable, the powers of Mr Macpherson, together with the part that he has taken in the translation and publication of a work, from which he derived his fame and fortune, will form the remaining part of this discussion.

## SECTION IX.

*Mr Macpherson's Collections of Gaelic Poetry.—Early Suspicions of their Authenticity.—Strengthened by some Expressions used by Mr Macpherson.—Estimate of his Abilities.—His Highlander, and his Translation of Homer.*

OF all the collections of Gaelic poetry which have, at different periods, been made, that of James Macpherson, Esq. has deservedly excited the greatest interest; and, as it was the first, in point of time, so it still continues to occupy the foremost rank, in point of intrinsic value. The poems themselves, which he has given us, are far more considerable in their extent, more finished in their structure, and of far purer style and

imagery than those which have been given by Dr Smith.

Mr Macpherson, indeed, in collecting these poems, enjoyed advantages which have not been, nor can ever henceforth be, enjoyed by any person, who engages in a similar undertaking. He began his researches twenty years earlier than any other collector; before that generation had yet passed away, in whose memory the knowledge and admiration of Gaelic poetry was still fresh. He travelled, by a most extensive route, through the Highlands and islands, supported by a liberal subscription of the friends of Celtic literature; and he was introduced everywhere to the gentlemen and clergy of the Highlands, by the patronage and recommendation of the eminent names of Dr Blair, Dr Robertson, Dr Carlyle, and Mr Home. Under such favourable auspices, it was not surprising that Mr Macpherson succeeded in obtaining almost all that was valuable in

the tradition, or written records of Gaelic poetry. To subsequent collectors, such as Dr Smith and Mr Kennedy, who engaged in this undertaking at a later period, on the limited scale of their own abilities and influence; and in the narrow circle, to which they had personal access, he left, as might have been expected, only a few meagre gleanings; some of which, however, are of unquestionable antiquity, and of undeniable merit.

From the high rank which Mr Macpherson's collections have been allowed to hold in the scale of poetic merit, contrasted with the supposed state of society in which they were said to have been composed, and the long period through which they were said to have been handed down by oral tradition, suspicions of their authenticity came naturally to be entertained; especially by persons who were unable, or unwilling, to take into consideration the circumstances, which have



been pointed out in the ancient history and manners of our Celtic ancestors.

Mr Macpherson himself, having, by certain expressions which have dropped from his pen, contributed, in some measure, to give additional strength to these suspicions, though perhaps without any such design, it may be proper here, shortly, to trace the share which he has had in these collections, as far as this can now be done, not in the manner of Mr Laing, by gratuitous inference and vague conjecture; but by an analysis of what has, by himself and others, been long ago made public to the world.

It appears, from the notices which have been given us of Mr Macpherson's character, by those who knew him best, that he was a man of an ardent and impatient spirit. Mr Hume charges him with pride and caprice.\* He calls him "a strange and hete-

\* Committee's Report, p. 5.

“roclite mortal, than whom he never knew  
“a man more perverse and unamiable.”\* It  
appears, at the same time, that Mr Macpher-  
son possessed a very considerable degree of  
literature; and that he had been actuated,  
from a very early period, with an eager pas-  
sion for literary fame.† Born in a remote  
corner of the Highlands of Scotland, he ap-  
pears to have entertained, from his youth, a  
high admiration of the traditional poetry of  
his country. In his Dissertation on the An-  
tiquity of Ossian’s Poems, prefixed to his  
first volume, he tells us, that “though he  
“admired the poems, in the original, very  
“early, and gathered part of them from tra-  
“dition, for his own amusement, yet he  
“never had the smallest hope of seeing  
“them in an English dress.” Dr Blair, ac-  
cordingly, in his letter to Mr Mackenzie,

\* Committee’s Report, p. 9.

† See, in the Report, the letters of Mr Home, Dr  
Carlyle, &c.

testifies, “ that, even after Mr Macpherson  
“ had gratified Mr John Home with the  
“ translation of two fragments of ancient  
“ Gaelic poetry, which were highly adm-  
“ red, when the Doctor urged him to trans-  
“ late the other pieces which he had, and  
“ bring them to him, he was extremely reluc-  
“ tant and averse to comply with his request;  
“ saying, that no translation could do jus-  
“ tice to the spirit and force of the original;  
“ and that, besides injuring them by transla-  
“ tion, he apprehended, that they would be  
“ very ill relished by the public, as so very  
“ different from the strain of modern ideas,  
“ and of modern connected and polished  
“ poetry. It was not,” adds he, “ till after  
“ much and repeated importunity, that I  
“ prevailed upon him,” &c.†

Anxious as he appears to have been, from  
an early period, to acquire literary reputa-

† See Report, Append. p. 56.

tion, he published, about 1758, a poem, entitled, *The Highlander*, the remembrance of which has been revived in the present controversy, by the industry of Mr Laing. The work itself had sunk into oblivion immediately on its first publication ; and, notwithstanding many excellencies which it unquestionably possesses, and of which a very natural account may be given, it will probably be admitted by his warmest friends, that the sentence of the public was, in this instance, just.

In about four years afterwards, Mr Macpherson having travelled, as has been said, into the Highlands, under the patronage of some persons of distinction and taste, for the purpose of collecting Gaelic poetry, gave to the world, successively, the poems of *Fingal* and *Temora*, with some lesser pieces of similar merit ; and, if we attend to this progress, we shall, it is presumed, find it difficult to conceive, that he should thus emerge

at once from the mediocrity of the neglected *Highlander*, to all the acknowledged splendour of genius, which is displayed in the poetry ascribed to Ossian.

Mr Laing remarks, very justly, on this subject, that the style and imagery of the *Fingal* occur in every page of the *Highlander*. But what is the inference which should follow from this remark? Is it not, that Mr Macpherson, when he wrote his *Highlander*, with a mind amply stored with those ancient poems, which, as he himself tells us, “ he had admired in the original very early, and part of “ which he had gathered from tradition, for “ his own amusement,”—was naturally led to transfer to his work those images and expressions, which, in the poetry of his country, had taken such a powerful hold of his youthful fancy? What is more natural than that Macpherson, deeply enamoured of this poetry, “ which he had never the smallest “ hope of seeing in an English dress ;” and

to which he was convinced "that no translation could do justice," should, however, avail himself, as much as he could, of his acquaintance with it, in his own poetical effusions?

Mr Macpherson seems uniformly to have mistaken his own powers, when he attempted an original work; but when he did make the attempt, with a mind deeply tinctured with the strains of Ossian, might it not have been expected that he should transfuse some of their beauties into his performance; and even that the poetry which had been the delight of his early years, should give its tone and colouring to every page that he wrote?

Will it here be argued with Mr Laing, that, "with a taste somewhat more matured," he transferred the beauties of the Highlander into his Ossian, and thus forced the public to peruse his neglected poem, as Sterne obliged the world to read his sermon, by making Corporal Trim the rehearser of it? Mr Laing knows very well that this is not,

nor has it been, the ordinary developement and progress of genius. It appears from the history of literature, that the *first* efforts of a mind, powerfully seized with the idea of a favourite subject, have ever been the most vigorous, and the most successful. Homer composed his immortal *Iliad*, before he “slumbered” over the *Odyssey*; and the *Paradise Lost* had exhausted the genius of Milton, before he sat down to compose his *Paradise Regained*.

The success of Mr Macpherson’s translations of the poetry ascribed to Ossian was very great. The sensation which was produced in the minds of literary men, was, in the highest degree, striking. That there should have existed such a body of truly classical verse amongst the Highlanders of Scotland, and that it should have been handed down through so many ages of barbarism, was undoubtedly new, and well calculated to excite suspicion, as well as sur-

prise. In the mean time, these poems were translated again into several foreign languages; the illustration of their beauties occupied several eminent critics; and, what was to Mr Macpherson of the greatest consequence, his fortune and independence were established.

It has been alleged, that Mr Macpherson has, by several insinuations thrown out in his later years, seemed to claim these poems as his own. This idea, however, we can ascertain not to have been in his mind in 1762, when he says in his Dissertation, “That his  
“ translation is literal; and that the transla-  
“ tor, as he claims no merit from his ver-  
“ sion, wishes that the imperfect semblance  
“ which he draws, may not prejudice the  
“ world against an original, which contains  
“ what is beautiful in simplicity, or grand  
“ in the sublime.”

In an advertisement prefixed to Fingal, he tells us, “that some men of genius advised



“ him to print the originals by subscription, “ rather than deposit them in a public library.” I have accordingly seen, in the London Magazine, (on which I cannot now, however, lay my hands) for the year 1784, or 1785, an advertisement, published on the occasion of the indecent controversy between Dr Johnson and Mr Macpherson, by Becket, the bookseller in the Strand, certifying, that the originals of Ossian had lain at his shop for subscription at some former period (as far as I recollect, 1774, or 1775) for the space of a whole year; but that the number of subscriptions being inadequate to the expence of publication, the manuscripts had been withdrawn.

Becket, it is true, was no judge of the originality of those manuscripts. But the circumstance proves, that, at that period, Mr Macpherson was disposed to give what he called the originals of Ossian to the public. And can it be supposed, that, in London, where there were then, as there are still,

many learned Highlanders, well versed in the language and antiquities of their country, and rendered anxious, by recent circumstances, for the honour of their national poetry, Mr Macpherson would have ventured to expose, during so long a period, a mass of spurious verse, as the genuine production of the Celtic Bard?

Mr Macpherson appears, however, at an early period, after the success of his translations had been ascertained, to have allowed some expressions to escape him, which have given rise to suspicions of fabrication, and which have been understood to imply an intention of appropriating this poetry to himself. After the strong and pointed assertions of their originality, which he had advanced in his prefaces and dissertations prefixed to the earlier editions, it was a matter of much delicacy, and of some risk, to attempt to turn the tide of public opinion from *Ossian* to the author of the *Highlander*. Without

pretending to guess the extent of his meaning, I find it necessary to examine those expressions of his, which have been represented by Mr Laing and others, as evidences of his attempt to claim this poetry as his own.

Mr Macpherson, in one passage, throws out the idea, "that those, who have doubted his veracity, have paid a compliment to his genius; and even were the allegation true," he adds, "my self-denial might have atoned for my fault. *I can assure my antagonists, that I should not translate what I could not imitate.*" And again, in a similar vein, he says, "the translator, who cannot *equal* his original, is incapable of expressing its beauties."

Without undertaking to ascertain the full extent of Mr Macpherson's meaning, in these pretensions, just criticism and truth require, that I should observe, that he himself has fortunately put it into our power to estimate his abilities as a translator, by a

very unequivocal test. In his miserable translation of Homer, he has enabled us to form a fair judgment of these pretensions; and it may not appear improbable, that the name of a man, who had never produced any *acknowledged* work of merit, would have been buried, long ere now, with his *own Highlander*, had not Ossian lent “his arm “of might” to rescue him from the gulf.

I would by no means be understood to detract from the merits of Mr Macpherson, or to maintain, that he had formed any deliberate design of appropriating this poetry to himself. Mr Macpherson’s merits, compared with that of the persons who followed him, were immense, both as an indefatigable collector, and as a spirited and elegant translator. But it is to be regretted, that in some moments of that caprice, which has been ascribed to him by those who knew him well, he should have been tempted to allow any expression to escape him, which

could be interpreted, by the most remote implication, as claiming this poetry as his own. As such expressions, however, occur in his later publications, it appears indispensibly necessary, on this occasion, to advert to them.

“ Without increasing his genius,” says Mr Macpherson, in one of his prefaces, “ the  
“ AUTHOR may have improved his language,  
“ in the eleven years that the poems have  
“ been before the public. Errors in diction  
“ may have been committed at twenty-four,  
“ which the experience of a riper age may  
“ remove, and some exuberances of imagery  
“ may be restrained with advantage, by a  
“ degree of judgment acquired in the pro-  
“ gress of time. In a convenient indiffer-  
“ ence to literary fame, the AUTHOR hears  
“ praise without being elevated, and ribald-  
“ ry without being depressed. The writer’s  
“ first intention was to have published in  
“ verse; and as the making of poetry may

“ be learned by industry, he had served his  
“ apprenticeship, though in secret, to the  
“ Muses.”

This language, it must be admitted, seems to involve an avowed claim to these Poems, on the part of Mr Macpherson; and so, no doubt, it has been understood by a great part of the public. That he should speak thus explicitly of himself, as the AUTHOR, and that he should talk of “restraining exuberances of imagery,” which is the proper province of the author, appears to be a style ill suited to the office of a mere translator, whose duty it is to adhere to his original, and to give a faithful representation of it, without detraction or embellishment.

We are enabled, however, from other unquestionable specimens, to form a tolerably just estimate of Mr Macpherson’s powers, and of his pretensions, should he be deemed to have made any, to that body of poetry which he has ushered into the world. When

we consider the rest of his literary efforts, with an impartial eye, it is presumed, that they will all be found to exhibit an inferiority of genius, and a mediocrity of talent, altogether unequal to the splendid poetry which, under the name of Ossian, has attracted the admiration of Europe.

Of his Highlander, we have spoken already. Conscious, it would seem, after the fate of that poem had been sealed, of the precise extent of his own powers, he never appears afterwards to have soared above the humble department of a collector and compiler of the works of others. To collect and arrange the papers of the House of Stuart, and to collect and translate the poetry of the Highlands of Scotland, were efforts of the same kind, and which required precisely the same turn of mind.

He says, "that the making of poetry may be learned by industry;" and informs us,

“that he had served his apprenticeship, “though in secret, to the Muses.” But it may be asked, whether the poetry of the *Highlander* was a “secret” to the world? And, even though Mr Macpherson found it no difficult matter “to make *such* poetry,” will it be alleged, that the fire of genius, without which verse is not poetry, is to be acquired by *industry*?

Dr Johnson has said well, in a letter addressed to Mr Macpherson, “Your abilities, “since your Homer, are not so formidable.”

Indeed, there is nothing which serves to set Mr Macpherson’s character and powers in a stronger light, than his egregious attempt to render the great Father of Poetry into prose, however natural it might have been for him to have made this attempt, after his success in doing the same office to Ossian. But here the public had before them the unrivalled original, with an ele-



gant translation by Pope; and Mr Macpherson's prose was immediately dispatched to the same shades which had, long ago, overwhelmed his *Highlander*.

How, it will naturally be asked, has he succeeded so well in his translation of Ossian, whilst he, who "would not deign to translate what he could not *imitate*, or "even *equal*," has failed so miserably in his translation of Homer? The solution is easy. The public had not the original of Ossian before them; nor had they another translation, by which they might have been enabled to form a comparative estimate. They were, therefore, under the necessity of receiving Ossian in the dress, and under the form, in which he was presented to them; and it has happened, that his intrinsic merit has supported him, even under the disadvantages of a translation. Let us put the case, that the poetry of Homer had been

presented to us under the same circumstances; the original lost, or withheld, and nothing remaining to us but Mr Macpherson's translation, still there is no doubt that Homer, even thus mutilated and disguised, would have commanded the respect that is due to his transcendent genius.

Add to all this, that it is hoped it will be made to appear, in the sequel of this argument, that Mr Macpherson, in his translation, has also done injustice to Ossian; and that, when certain writers have amused themselves with criticising some phrases and images, which occur in his work, it is not Ossian, but his translator, who is the subject of their animadversion. Though this, indeed, is a topic which cannot receive its full weight, till we have before us the whole originals, or a translation, on the fidelity of which we can rely, still, it may be observed, that we are already in possession of suffi-

cient materials, to enable us to judge of the internal evidence which these Poems afford of their authenticity; and to conclude, that the Gaelic of Ossian has suffered as much under Mr Macpherson's hands as the Greek of Homer.

## SECTION X.

*Internal Evidence of the Authenticity of these Poems.*

—*Exemplified by a literal Translation of the Seventh Book of Temora, published, in the Original, by Mr Macpherson, at an early Period, compared with his own Translation.—That Mr Macpherson has, in many instances, in his Translation, suppressed and added; and that he has frequently misunderstood his Original.—Testimonies of his having been but very imperfectly skilled in the Gaelic Language.*

THE peculiar circumstances in which we stand, with respect to the great bulk of the Gaelic poetry which has been translated by Mr Macpherson, render it extremely difficult to form a just estimate of the amount of that evidence which might be deduced from the style, the manners, and the imagery which

peculiarly characterise these Poems. We have the translation before us; but without the original, with which to compare it, it appears to be almost impossible to ascertain precisely the degree of colouring which it may have received from the particular taste, the habits of thinking, and the literary acquirements of the translator.

Mr Macpherson, in one of the earlier editions of these Poems, published the Seventh Book of Temora in the original Gaelic, as a specimen of the harmony of Ossian's versification, and, at the same time, as an example of a new mode of spelling that language, which he wished to introduce. It consists of four hundred and twenty-three lines. We have also, through the hands of Mr Macpherson, Malvina's Dream, of fifty-seven lines, a portion of the Poem of Carrickthura, and a few other fragments. Besides these, I know of no other of the poems, translated by Mr Macpherson, that have been given to

the public, in the original, by himself. But I would congratulate the lovers of Celtic literature, on the prospect that is now afforded of the publication of the entire originals, as left by Mr Macpherson, in the hands of the late John Mackenzie, Esq. of the Temple, London.\* By a printed notice, dated Edinburgh, 1st February, 1806, and signed John Sinclair, it is intimated, that these are now to be published, under the auspices of a Committee of the Highland Society of London, consisting of Sir John Sinclair himself, Sir John Macpherson, Sir John Macgregor Murray, and others well qualified for this office.

\* These originals, it is understood, are all in a modern hand, transcribed by Mr Macpherson himself, or by his amanuensis. No ancient manuscripts appear, though it is certain that he had the use of some which he never returned, particularly from the Clanranald family. It is not improbable, that, with that caprice which has been ascribed to him, he might have destroyed, as he copied them; for to copy and arrange them was necessary, previous to his translating them.

Even the scanty portions of the original, however, which Mr Macpherson has given us already, are sufficient to enable us to ascertain, with some precision, the share which he had in the work; and when we compare them with his own translation, a very singular view of the subject presents itself; which, considering it as peculiarly important in this argument, I shall now beg leave to detail.

It is very remarkable, that, compared with the slovenly translations, or rather paraphrases, of Dr Smith, a man of acknowledged literature, an able author of original works in English; and well known as an eminent adept in the Gaelic language, Mr Macpherson far surpasses him as a translator. Mr Macpherson frequently represents, with great success, the rapid and sententious form of the original; and, in general, he renders the sense of his author with much fidelity. When we take into view

these undeniable merits of Mr Macpherson, together with the circumstances in which he stood when he produced these translations, he must appear, in a great measure, excusable to the public, for any imperfections or inaccuracies which may now appear in these translations. It could not, surely, enter into his mind, that there was any probability that further accuracy should ever be required; or that the only method of ascertaining the authenticity of these Poems, which is now within our reach, should ever be resorted to,—that of comparing his translation with the few fragments which are now amongst our hands. He gave, in general, the meaning of his author, with a very tolerable transfusion of his spirit. When we take into account the performances of others, from whom more might have been expected, we may, perhaps, be allowed to conclude, that few persons could have been able, for the first time, to have of-



ferred such an elegant translation of Ossian as Mr Macpherson has done.

In the present state of the question, however, when the proper, and once familiar, evidences of Ossian's authenticity are now for ever lost, it becomes necessary to have recourse to internal characters of truth; and it is hoped, that the warmest friends of Mr Macpherson will forgive this investigation, which now, alone, is left to us.

To those who understand the original of the few inimitable fragments which have passed through Mr Macpherson's hands, there can be nothing more evident, than that he is the mere translator; and that, with all his acknowledged merits, he has often translated ill. A striking instance of this has been already adduced, in the verses procured by Mr S. Cameron, from Highland tradition, and transmitted to me by Professor Richardson. And it will appear, in the subsequent

investigation, that, in translating the fragments, of which he himself has furnished us with the original, he has suppressed, or lost, many beauties of the Gaelic, both in expression and in imagery; whilst he has unwarrantably added images and expressions, which are not there to be found; additions which, without contributing to the beauty of the poem, deprive it of its air of simplicity and antiquity, and give it the appearance of a modern and sophisticated poem.

But, what is still more decisive, it will appear, that he has, on many occasions, misunderstood the originals which he had before him, and translated falsely. I shall produce a striking instance of this, from the fragment of the Poem of Carrickthura, published in the Committee's Report. It is in the description of Fingal's celebrated combat with the Spirit of Loda. The Spirit having boasted, that he dwelt, undisturbed, in his plea-

sant plains, in the clouds, Fingal thus replies :

“ *Gabhsa comhuidh na do ruoin*

“ *Thairt righ nach b' fhaoin, 's a laimh air beairt :*

“ *Neo cuimhnich Mac Cumhail air raon ;*

“ *'S lag do thannas ; 's mòr mo neart.*”

This, with the addition of two words in italics, is, literally,

“ Take up thy abode in thy plains *of air*,

“ Said the not vain (*i. e.* the valiant) king, with his hand  
on his weapon,

“ Else remember the son of Comhal, on the plain :

“ Feeble is thy shade ; great is my might.

This whole passage Mr Macpherson translates, in these words:—“ Dwell in thy pleasant fields, said the king ; let Comhal's son be forgot.”

Here, it is evident, that Mr Macpherson has totally misunderstood the term *neo*, in the third line, and which here signifies *else*, or *otherwise* ; translating it as if it were the particle *neo*, which, compounded with an ad-

jective, has, in Gaelic, the force of the English particle *un*, in *unfaithful*, and converts the term, to which it is added, into an opposite sense. Thus, the adjective *chiontach*, "guilty," with the particle *neo* prefixed to it, (*neo-chiontach*,) signifies "not guilty, or "innocent." In consequence of this egregious mistake, the translator has completely lost the sense of the original, and makes the undaunted Fingal solicit a compromise with the Spirit of Loda, altogether unworthy of his character. It is, as if he had said, "Let me go, and I shall let thee go." But to make this sense of the passage tolerable, Mr Macpherson finds himself under the necessity of omitting the greatest part of the line immediately preceding, and the whole of the line which follows.

This being a topic of the greatest consequence in this discussion, it is deemed necessary, in order to give it its full force, to offer a new and literal translation of the Se-

venth Book of Temora, compared with that which has been given by Mr Macpherson. This, in the original, has always appeared to me a very perfect and sublime specimen of ancient poetry. Though some passages in Dr Smith's Seandana are equal to it, in every respect, yet there occurs, from time to time, in the poems of that collection, a vast inferiority of merit, as might have been expected, from the circumstances which have been stated. Nothing of this inequality is to be found in the Seventh Book of Temora. It is beautiful, elegant, and dignified throughout. It may be deemed important and interesting, then, to enter into a critical examination of this fragment, as it has been given us by Mr Macpherson himself. Mr Laing has remarked, with regard to this fragment, "that in it the whole mythology of mist is exhibited." I have heard of the mythology of the Egyptians, and of the Greeks, and of various nations; but must

confess, that I never heard of “the mythology of mist,” and find myself at a loss to affix any precise idea to the expression. I am ready to allow, however, that a just appreciation of this important relique of antiquity, in the original, and in Mr Macpherson’s translation, may enable us, with much effect, to develope some of that mystery, in which this subject has been so long involved.

It is a wise ordination of Providence, and a very fortunate circumstance for society, that the line of truth is direct and plain, and that every one, who moves in it, advances easy and secure; whilst the line of deceit, of falsehood, and of forgery, is the most difficult, and the most dangerous. There are few of those deeds of darkness that refuse to meet the public eye, which have not been found to bear upon them certain intrinsic characters, which have, at length, betrayed the imposture.

To this infallible test let the Seventh Book of Temora be brought, and, I will add, Malvina's Dream, the fragment of Carrickthura, and some of the purer passages of Dr Smith's collection; and if, in considering these, it can be shewn, that, independently of the charms of a very harmonious versification, necessarily lost in the translation, the Gaelic is, throughout, the most perfect and finished composition; that it possesses beauties, which are altogether lost, even in Mr Macpherson's version; and is adorned with elegancies of imagery and expression, which have not been, nor can easily be, transfused into another language; and, above all, if it can be shewn, that, in many instances, Mr Macpherson has misunderstood, and misinterpreted, the Gaelic, it is presumed, that it will not be hastily alleged, with Mr Laing, "that Macpherson first wrote his Ossian in English, and that, as he wrote, he translated into Gaelic."

What, indeed, can be more incredible, than that Mr Macpherson should labour the Gaelic so much in point of language, and imagery, and versification, the greatest part of which has not yet, and perhaps never shall, meet the public eye, whilst he neglected to transfuse so many important beauties, there to be found, into his translation, on which his fame and fortune immediately depended?

There are, it may be observed, other grounds, besides that of frequent mistranslation, which render it more than probable, that Mr Macpherson was only a mean proficient in the Gaelic language. Mrs Gallie, widow of the late Reverend Mr Gallie of Kincardine, in Ross-shire, writes to Charles Macintosh, Esq. “ that there is not any  
“ thing more in her remembrance, than see-  
“ ing, with Mr Macpherson, when he re-  
“ turned from his tour, the Gaelic manu-  
“ scripts described by her husband. She re-



“ members Macpherson most busy at the  
 “ translation, *and he and Mr Gallie differ-*  
 “ *ing as to the meaning of some Gaelic*  
 “ *words.*” \*

Captain Morison of Greenock, the friend and coadjutor of Macpherson, in the translation, writes, “ that he was intimately acquainted with his abilities, and knowledge of the Gaelic language; he admits, that he had much merit in collecting, and arranging, and translating: but that, so far from composing such poems as were translated, *he assisted him often in understanding some words, and suggested some improvements.*” †

I have further to state, that the Reverend Mr Irvine, now minister at Little Dunkeld, in Perthshire, permits me to say, “ that Captain Morison was his intimate ac-

\* Report, p. 37.

† Report, App. p. 177.

“quaintance and friend; and that he now  
 “possesses, in the original manuscript, much  
 “of the correspondence which passed be-  
 “tween Mr Macpherson and Captain Mori-  
 “son, during the progress of the collection  
 “and translation of Ossian’s Poems;” (which,  
 it is to be hoped, Mr Irvine will, some time  
 or other, communicate to the public.\*) He  
 adds, “that Mr Morison assured him, that  
 “Mr Macpherson understood the Gaelic  
 “language very imperfectly; that *he* (Mr  
 “Morison) wrote out the Gaelic for him, for  
 “the most part, on account of Mr Macpher-  
 “son’s inability to write or spell it properly;  
 “that Captain Morison assisted him much  
 “in translating; and that it was their gene-

\* As every thing which fell from Mr Macpherson’s pen, on this subject, is interesting, I shall subjoin a copy of a letter, which he wrote to his friend Captain Morison, in 1789, relating to the perfection of Gaelic literature, obligingly communicated by a Reverend friend.

“ral practice, when any passage occurred,  
“ which they did not well understand, *either*  
“ *to pass it over entirely, or to gloss it over*  
“ *with any expressions* that might appear to  
“ coalesce easily with the context.”

So far Mr Irvine. He furnishes a very important key to Mr Macpherson's translations; and, it will be shewn, that, in translating the Seventh Book of Temora particularly, these gentlemen have too often had recourse to this process of skimming over the surface, and neglecting to render the true sense of the originals before them.

Considering it as of much importance, with regard to this point, to adduce every authentic fact that can now be collected, with regard to Mr Macpherson's conduct in this matter, I beg leave to give an extract of a letter, from my esteemed friend Dr Duncan Macfarlane, Minister at Drymen, (of June 2, 1806,) stating a conversation

which his late father and predecessor, well known as an eminent proficient in the Gaelic language, had, at an early period, with the translator of Ossian.

“The conversation,” says the Doctor, “between Mr Macpherson and my late father, of which you desire an account, took place in the year 1762. My father had been led to doubt the accuracy of Mr Macpherson’s account of the way in which he obtained the materials of what he published as the Poems of Ossian, and even to question the existence of the ancient manuscripts, which he pretended to have discovered. Meeting him in London, he earnestly pressed him to remove these doubts, by publishing all the originals in his possession ; adding, ‘ *as I perceive you are very imperfectly acquainted with the Gaelic language*, I shall, if you please, procure you the assistance of one of the first Gae-

“lic scholars † in Scotland to revise your  
“manuscript, and correct the press.’ Mr  
“Macpherson appeared, at first, disposed to  
“embrace this offer; but, at their next in-  
“terview, he had changed his mind, and  
“spoke of depositing his papers in some  
“public library.”

The only inference, that it is intended to draw from these testimonies, is, that Mr Macpherson was imperfectly skilled in the Gaelic language; that, in transcribing and translating, he made use of the assistance of others, who were better versed in the language than himself, such as Mr Gallie, Captain Morison, and Ewan Macpherson, who accompanied him through the Hebrides;

† Besides attesting, that I had the account of the above conversation myself, from the late Mr Macfarlane, I can add, from my own recollection, and from the testimony of his son, that the accomplished Gaelic scholar, whom he had in view, was the Reverend Mr Alexander Macfarlane, then minister at Arroquhar.

and hence, that it is impossible, that he could be the author even of those scanty, but highly finished, fragments of Gaelic verse, which he himself has communicated to the public.

NOTICE CONCERNING THE FOLLOWING  
TRANSLATION.

THE following translation of the Seventh Book of Temora is literal, as far as the genius of the different languages will admit. There is reason to apprehend, that, in many instances, from an earnest endeavour to render the sense of the original with fidelity, the translation will appear harsh and inelegant; but it is hoped, that this defect will appear to be compensated, in some measure, by the precision of the idea, which such a translation will afford, of the genius and structure of Gaelic verse. It is even hoped, that the translator, though translating literally, will be found to have sometimes succeeded in presenting to the ear some faint

semblance of the harmony of Ossian's versification.

There is, at least, one beauty of the original, which, it is hoped, will be, in some degree, represented in this translation, by preserving the distinct structure of the verses which is found in the Gaelic, but which is entirely lost in the prosaic form of that of Mr Macpherson. In the original, we may trace throughout, in every couplet, a parallelism, or balancing, of the sentiment conveyed in the verses, similar to what Dr Lowth has pointed out in the sacred poesy of the Hebrews, and which is probably common to the poetry of every early people. I have given some instances of this already, (p. 53.) in the verses communicated by Professor Richardson. We meet with this parallelism throughout this book, except where the narration is rapid, as in Fonnar's song, ver. 303. Thus,



- Ver. 34. " Has sleep visited the husband of Clatho?  
" Dwells my father in slumbers?"
49. " He struck the shield of resounding boss,  
" The shield that hung high in night."
180. " I have risen, as a light, from the battle,  
" As a meteor of night from the bursting cloud."

I think, that it is impossible, for any person of taste, even though unacquainted with the original, to compare the balanced couplets of the literal version, with the curtailed, and often unharmonious, prose of Mr Macpherson; and to entertain a doubt, whether he was the mere translator, or the author of this poetry. But even though his version may be deemed the most elegant,—and it is not denied that it possesses many beauties,—still, it is demonstrable, that it is not just; and it will be allowed, that nothing can compensate the want of truth.

There are a few expressions, which, though they convey a very precise idea to the ear of a Highlander, it has been found, in many instances, impossible to translate. The only

expressions of this kind, however, of which I shall now take notice, are the characteristic epithets, which occur so often in this Book, and in all Ossian's Poems, *nam bolg* and *nan colg*. These, indeed, with many other expressions, which, from the peculiar idiom of the language, it has been found difficult to translate, Mr Macpherson has, very conveniently, omitted altogether, or satisfied himself, according to the practice ascribed to him by Mr Morison, "with glossing them over," by the first easy phrase that occurred. The two expressions already mentioned, though they occur more than twelve times in the following poem, have been uniformly omitted by Mr Macpherson, except in, I think, two instances.

*Colg* signifies, literally, "bristles," and is used in the poem of Diarmid, in Dr Smith's *Seandana*, to denote the bristles of the boar. Connan says :

“ *Tomhais an torc an aghaidh a chuilg :*”

That is,

“ Measure the boar against the bristles.”

We find the people of Fingal, in these poems, generally styled “ *Nan Colg*,” or “ the bristled,” probably from the fierceness of their looks, and their bristled hair and beards. This term, accordingly, has sometimes been rendered by “ fierce,” or “ warlike.”

Another race of men, mentioned in these poems, particularly those of the south of Ireland, and of the southern and eastern parts of Caledonia, are styled “ *Nam Bolg* ;” the *Bολγοι* of Pausanias; and the Belgæ of the Romans. *Bolg*, in Gaelic, signifies, literally, “ the bellyed,” or “ the corpulent,” and might be applied, as a characteristic epithet, to the inhabitants of the richer districts and Lowlands. This, however, is given only in the way of conjecture.

The original Gaelic and the literal translation are placed opposite to each other; Mr Macpherson's translation is placed at the bottom; and a few notes, or observations, are subjoined, wherever they appear necessary. The *same* marks of reference which lead to these notes, are affixed to the parallel passages in the Gaelic, in the new translation, and in that of Mr Macpherson.

With regard to the edition of the original Gaelic which I have used, it may be proper to say, that I had it, a great many years ago, from the late Reverend Mr Hugh Macdiarmid, then minister of the Gaelic Chapel at Glasgow, and afterwards minister of Comrie. That gentleman, who was critically skilled in the Gaelic language, had felt indignant at the novel mode of spelling, which Mr Macpherson had attempted to introduce; but which he, in common with all who are acquainted with the Gaelic, considered as destructive of the etymological proprieties of

the language. He, therefore, transcribed this Seventh Book of Temora from Mr Macpherson's printed copy, into his common place book, in the usual orthography. The peculiarity of Mr Macpherson's mode of spelling consists in the elision of the quiescent letters, and in adapting it to the pronunciation.

The translator has only to add, that it is with some diffidence that he now presents this translation to the public, to which that of Mr Macpherson has been so long familiar, that it has acquired a degree of veneration in its eyes. When, however, it is perceived how far he has, in many instances, departed from his original, how much he has added, and how much he has suppressed, it will, perhaps, appear desirable to see the venerable Bard divested of adventitious ornaments, and exhibited as nearly in his own garb as the genius of our language will permit. In such a translation, we might hope, that a glimpse might

be caught of the spirit of Ossian, as he passes along, even in the unpropitious garb of a foreign idiom; and it might even be presumed, that many, who are strangers to the language in which these Poems were composed, would be induced, by the aid which such a faithful version would afford, to cultivate the tongue in which Fingal spoke, and Ossian sung.

Indeed, were the originals before the public, as it is earnestly hoped they soon shall be, a field would be opened up for the hitherto neglected study of Celtic literature, which, there can be no doubt, would attract the attention of the learned over all Europe. And, supposing these originals to be, throughout, as perfect and elegant as the piece which is now presented, one might even presume to foretell, that the language, in which they are composed, will be studied in Ossian, long after it has ceased to be vernacular in any corner of the British empire.

THE  
SEVENTH BOOK  
OF  
T E M O R A,  
AN EPIC POEM.

FIRST PUBLISHED IN  
THE ORIGINAL GAELIC,  
BY JAMES MACPHERSON, ESQ.

AND NOW  
TRANSLATED LITERALLY,

WITH  
MR MACPHERSON'S TRANSLATION  
ANNEXED.

TO WHICH ARE ADDED  
NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS.

## TEMORA, BOOK VII.

*O* Linne doir-choille na Leugo,  
*Air uair, eiridh ceo taobh-ghorm nan tonn :*  
*'Nuair a dhuineas dorsa na h' oiche,*  
*Air iulair-shuil greine nan speur.*  
*Domhail mu Lara nan sruth,* 5  
*Thaomas duibh neul, as doirche gruaim.*  
*Mar ghlas sgiath, roimh thaomadh nan nial,*  
*Snamh seachad tha gealach na h' oiche.*  
*Le sho cididh taoibhsean o shean,*

## MR MACPHERSON'S

FROM the wood-skirted waters of Lego, ascend, at times, gray-bosomed mists, when the gates of the west are closed on the sun's eagle-eye. Wide, over Lara's



## LITERALLY TRANSLATED.

**F**ROM the pool of wood-skirted Lego,  
 At times, ascend the blue-sided mists of the waves :  
 When closed are the gates of night,  
 On the eagle-eye of the sun of the skies.  
 Swelling around Lara of streams, 5  
 Pour black clouds of darkest gloom :  
 Like a gray shield, before the bursting of the clouds,  
 Swims along the moon of night.  
 With this invest the ghosts, of old,

---

## TRANSLATION.

stream, is poured the vapour, dark and deep. The  
 moon, like a dim shield, is swimming through its folds.  
 With this clothe the spirits of old

*An dlu-ghleus,\* ameasg na gaoith.* 10  
*Siad a leunnich o' osnadh gn osnadh,*  
*Air dubh aghaidh oiche nan sian.*  
*Ann taobh oiteig, gu paluin nan seod,*  
*Taomidh iad ceathach nan speur ;*  
*Gorm-thalla do thammais nach beo,* 15  
*Gu am ciridh fonn marbh rann nan teud.*

*Tha torman am machair nan crann :*

---

MR MACPHERSON'S

their sudden gestures,\* on the wind, when they stride  
 from blast to blast, along the dusky night, often blende  
 with the gale, to some warrior's grave, they roll the

---

\* Besides remarking in Mr Macpherson's translation of the  
 above passage, that though he, upon the whole, renders the sense  
 of the original with tolerable fidelity, he, at the same time, loses,  
 and, from apparent hurry, suppresses many elegant images, I must  
 observe, particularly, that the expression, "sudden gestures," by  
 which he translates "*dlu-ghleus*," is as devoid of meaning, as it  
 is foreign to the sense of the original. The expression, in the ori-  
 ginal, evidently alludes to a mythology, (for there is a mythology  
 in Ossian of a very appropriate kind,) which was well known to  
 Mr Macpherson, but of which, in this instance, he loses sight.

Their *close-gathered* forms,\* amidst the winds. 10  
As they pass (leap) from blast to blast,  
On the dusky countenance of the stormy night,  
On the skirt of the gale, to the dwelling of the brave,  
They pour the vapour of the skies :  
A blue mansion to the shades of the deceased, 15  
Till the season that the death-song rises on the  
strings.

There is a rustling sound in the field of trees :

---

## TRANSLATION.

mist, a gray dwelling to his ghost, until the songs  
arise.

A sound came from the desert :

---

The ghosts, or shades, of the deceased are uniformly represented, by Ossian, as thin and feeble forms, which were liable to be tossed about by the blast, and even to have their substance, at times, torn and dispersed by the winds; an example of which occurs immediately below, at verse 23. It became necessary for them, therefore, to guard against such accidents, and to gather their unsubstantial forms into close array. Having this well known mythology in our eye, the expression, "*close-gathered forms*," suggests a precise and appropriate idea. See below Mr Macpherson's translation of verse 53.

'Se Connar rìgh Eirìn a t' ann,  
*A taomadh ceo tannais gu dluth,*  
*Air Faolan,\* aig Lubhar nan sruth.* 20  
*Muladach, suidhe fo bhron,*  
*Dhaom an taibhs ann ceathach an loin.*

*Thaom osnadh eisin ann fein ;*  
*Ach phill an cruth aluin gu dian ; †*  
*Phill e le chrom shealladh, mall,* 25  
*Le ceo leadain, mar shuibhal nan sian.*  
*'S doilleir sho!*  
*Ata na sloigh nan suain, san am,*

---

MR MACPHERSON'S

It was Connar, king of Inisfail. He poured the mist on Fillan,\* at blue winding Lubar. Dark and mournful sat the ghost, in his gray ridge of smoke. The blast, at times, rol-

---

\* Fillan, the son of Fingal, had been lately killed. See Book VI.

† We have here a fine example of the mythology alluded to in a preceding note. The ghost of Fillan had been rolled together by the blast, but soon resumed its form. Should it gratify any

It is Connar, king of Erin,  
 Pouring thick the mist of ghosts,  
 On Fillan,\* at streamy Lubar. 20  
 Sad, sitting in grief,  
 Descended the ghost, in the mist of the vale  
 (meadow,)  
 The blast rolled him together;  
 But the noble form quickly returned *into itself*; †  
 It returned, slowly, with downcast look, 25  
 With locks of mist, like the course of storms:  
 It is dark!  
 The hosts, meantime, are sunk in sleep,

## TRANSLATION.

led him together: but the form returned again; † it returned  
 with bending eyes, and dark-winding locks of mist.  
 It is dark! The sleeping hosts were still,

---

critic to have a similar image pointed out in another poet, I  
 should refer him to Milton's

———“ But the ethereal substance closed,  
 “ Not long divisible.”———

*Paradise Lost*, Book vi. ver. 330.

*Ann trusgan ciar na h' oiche.*

*Dh' illsich tein an rìgh, gu h' ard ;* 30

*Dhaom e na aonar air sgiath.*

*Thuit coddal nu shuilean a Ghaisgich ;*

*Thanig guth Fhaolain na chluais:—*

“ *An coddal sho don Fhear-posda aig Clatho?\** ”

“ *Am bheil comhuidh dom athair ann suain? 35* ”

“ *Am bheil cuimhne—'smi an trusgan nan nial,*

“ *'Smi 'm aonar ann am na h' oiche?'* ”

#### MR MACPHERSON'S

in the skirts of night. The flame decayed on the hill of Fingal. The king lay, lonely, on his shield. His eyes were half-closed in sleep. The voice of Fillan came:---“ Sleeps

\* A striking coincidence, not only of thought, but even of expression, will be found between this nightly dialogue of Fillan's ghost, and Fingal; and a well known passage in the Iliad of Homer, which, however, has escaped the industry of Mr Laing. In the Iliad, (lib. xxiii. v. 65.) the ghost of Patroclus comes to Achilles, in a dream, and complains, that he is yet left without the rites of sepulture. The ghost says, almost in the words of Fillan,

Ἐυδεις, ἀλλὰ ἐμεῖο λελασμενος ἐπλευ, Ἀχιλλεῦ;

*Wrapt* in the dusky robe of night.  
 Lowered is the flame of the king, on high,      30  
 He bended, lonely, on his shield.  
 Sleep descended on the eyes of the hero.  
 The voice of Filian met his ear:—  
 “ Sleeps thus the husband of Clatho? \*  
 “ Does my father dwell in slumbers?      35  
 “ Does he remember me in my vesture of mist,  
 “ Whilst I am lonely, in the season of night?”

## TRANSLATION.

“ the husband of Clatho? \* Dwells the father of the fal-  
 “ len in rest? Am I forgot in the folds of darkness, lonely,  
 “ in the season of night?”

That is:—“ Dost thou sleep, and hast thou forgotten me, Achil-  
 les?” Achilles replies,

Τίπτε μοι, ἦθειη κεφαλῆ, δευρῶ εἰληληθῆας;

That is:—“ Why, dear friend, has thou come hither?” Who does not perceive, that this coincidence is the natural consequence of the superstition concerning funeral rites, which was common to the most of ancient nations?

“ *C’arson a tha thu am aistlin fein?*”  
*Thuir Fionghall, ’s e g’ eiridh grad :*  
 “ *An di-chuimhn dhamhsa mo mhac,* 40  
 “ *No shuibhal teine, air reidhlan nan taoch?*  
 “ *Ni mar sin, air anam an righ*  
 “ *Thig gnìomh seoid aluin nan cruaidh bheum.*

“ *Ni ’n dealan iadsa, a theichas ann duibhre*  
 “ *Na h’ oiche ; ’s nach fhag a lorg.* 45  
 “ *’S cuimhu leam Faolan na shuain :*  
 “ *’Ta m’ anam aig eiridh borb.”*  
*Ghluais an righ le shleadh gu grad ;*  
*Bhuail e an sgiath is fuaimnich cop,*

## MR MACPHERSON’S

“ Why dost thou mix,” said the king, “ with the  
 “ dreams of thy father? Can I forget thee, my son, or  
 “ thy path of fire in the field? Not such come the deeds  
 “ of the valiant, on the soul of Fingal. They are not  
 “ there a beam of lightning, which is seen, and is then



“ Why art thou in my dreams ?”

Said Fingal, rising in haste,

“ Can I forget my son, 40

“ Or his path of fire, in the field of the brave ?

“ Not thus, on the soul of the king,

“ Come the actions of the heroes of hardy deeds,  
(strokes.)

“ No flash are they that passes in the darkness

“ Of night, and leaves no trace behind. 45

“ I remember Fillan in his rest :

“ My soul arises furious.”

The king advanced with his spear, in haste;  
He struck the shield of resounding boss ;

TRANSLATION.

“ no more. I remember thee, O Fillan, and my wrath  
“ begins to rise.”

The king took his deathful † spear, and struck the  
deep-sounding shield ;

† There is nothing of “ deathful,” or “ dismal,” in the original.

<i>An sgiath a dh' aom s' an oiche ard,</i>	
<i>Ball mosglaidh do chath nan lot.</i>	50
<i>Air aomadh duhh nan sliabh,†</i>	
<i>Air gaoith, theich treud nan taibhs' :</i>	
<i>O ghleannan ciar nan iomadh lub,</i>	
<i>Mhosguil guth a bhais.</i>	55
<i>Bhuail e an sgiath, an dara cuairt ;</i>	
<i>Ghluais cogadh an aishin an t' shluaigh ;</i>	
<i>Bhi comhstri nan lann glas</i>	
<i>A dealradh air anam nan seod :</i>	
<i>—Cim-feadhna a druidealh gu cath :</i>	60
<i>—Sluagh a teicheadh,—gnìomh bu chruaidh,</i>	

## MR MACPHERSON'S

his shield that hung high in night; the dismal sign of war! Ghosts fled on every side, and rolled their gathered forms\* on the wind. Thrice, from the winding vale, arose the voice of deaths. *The harps of the bards, untouched, sound mournful over the hill, (probably hall.)* He

\* "Gathered forms" is here introduced, where it is wanting in the original. The sentence printed in italics does not occur in my edition of the Gaelic.

The shield that hung high in night;                    50  
 The instrument that roused to the battle of wounds.  
 Upon the dusky slopes of the mountains,†  
 On wind, fled the tribes of ghosts.  
 From the gray vale of many windings  
 Awoke the voice of death.                                    55  
 He struck the shield a second time (round :)  
 Battles arose in the dreams of the host.  
 The strife of blue swords,  
 Gleamed upon the souls of the heroes;—  
 Chiefs closing in battle;—                                    60  
 People flying;—hardiest deeds,

## TRANSLATION.

struck again the shield; battles rose in the dreams of  
 the people. The wide-tumbling strife is gleaming over  
 their souls. Blue-shielded kings descend to war. Back-  
 ward-looking armies fly, and mighty deeds

† This verse, though very beautiful, is omitted by Mr Macpher-  
son.

*Leth-dhoilleir ann dealan an staluin.\**

*N' uair dheirich an dara fuaim,†*

*Leum feidh o' chos nan carn.*

*Chluinte an sgreadan sgè 's an fhasaich, 65*

*Gach eun air ossaig fhein.*

*Leth-eirich siol Albin nam buadh,*

*Thog iad suas gach sleagh bu ghlas :*

*Ach phill samhchair air an t' shluagh,*

*'Se bh' ann sgiath Mhorbheinn nam fras 70*

*Phill coddal air suilean nam Fear :*

*Bu dorcha trom an gleann.*

MR MACPHERSON'S

are half-hid in the bright gleam of steel.\* .

But, when the third † sound arose, deer started from the clefts of the rocks. The screams of fowl are heard, in the desert, as each flew, frightened, on his blast. The

\* It is needless to remark the liberties taken by Mr Macpherson, in translating this passage ; they will appear from the literal version. There is nothing, in the original, of those rumbling epithets,—“ wide-tumbling, blue-shielded, or backwards flying.” These might be justly styled bombast by any critic.

† It appears evident, that Mr Macpherson has entirely mis-

Half-obscure, in the gleam of steel.\*

When the second sound arose,†

Deer started from the caverns of the rocks ;

There was heard the scream of birds in the desert,

Each bird on its own blast ; 66

Half arose the race of victorious Albion,

They lifted up their gray spears.

But silence returned upon the host :

It was the shield of showery Morven. 70

Sleep returned upon the eyes of the heroes ;

Dark and gloomy (heavy) was the vale.

#### TRANSLATION.

sous of Morven half-rose, and half-assumed their spears ;  
but silence rolled back on the host : they knew the  
shield of the king. Sleep returned to their eyes ; the  
field was dark and still.

calculated the different alarms given by the shield of Fingal ; and hence he finds himself obliged to omit the expression, “ the second “ time,” in verse 56, and to mistranslate the expression, “ the “ second sound,” in verse 63. It will appear afterwards, that the *third* sound of the shield was not heard till Suilvala comes to Cathmor, versè 92.

*N' im bu choddal duitse 's an uair,*  
*Nighean shuilghorm Chomhoir nam buadh.*  
*Chual Suilmhala an fhuaim; 75*  
*Dh' eirich i san oiche le gruaim;*  
*'Ta a ceum gu righ Atha nan colg:*  
*" N' im mosguil cunart anam borb."\**

*Trom a sheas i, a suilean sios;*  
*'Ta 'n speur † ann losgadh nan reul. 80*  
*Chualas leatha sgiath nan cop:*  
*Ghluais: ghrad sheas an oigh:*  
*Dh' eirich a guth; ach dhaom e sios.*

---

MR MACPHERSON'S

No sleep was thine, in darkness, blue-eyed daughter of Conmor. Suilmalla heard the dreadful shield, and rose amidst the night. Her steps are towards the king of Atha. Can danger shake his daring soul!\* In doubt,

---

\* Mr Macpherson seems not to perceive, that this line is a soliloquy of Suilvala.

† In all the originals before us, there occurs no term, which should be translated "heaven." Here it is *speur*, "the sky."

But no sleep was thine, at the time,  
 Blue-eyed daughter of victorious Connor.  
 Suilvala had heard the sound : 75  
 She arose, through night, in sadness.  
 Her steps are towards the king of warlike Atha :—  
 “ Danger,” *said she to herself*, “ will not move his  
     daring soul.” \*  
 Sad she stood with downcast eyes :  
 The sky † is bright with stars. 80  
 She had heard the bossy shield.  
 She advanced. Soon stopped the maid.  
 Her voice arose ; but sunk again.

## TRANSLATION.

she stands, with bending eyes. Heaven † burns with all its stars.

Again ‡ the shield resounds. She rushed : she stopped. Her voice half-rose : it failed.

---

‡ From Mr Macpherson's miscalculation of the alarms given by Fingal's shield, he falls into repeated errors. The shield did not sound *again*, on *this* occasion. It was the *second* sound, mentioned verse 63, that had roused the fears of Suilvala.

*Chunnaic is e na staluin chruaidh,  
A dealradh ri losgadh nan reul.* 85

*Chunnaic is e, na leadan trom  
Aig eiridh ri osnadh nan speur.*

*Thionnda i a ceumna le fianh :*

*“ Carson a dhuisgeam’s rìgh Eirin nam bolg? \**

*“ Ni ’n aislin da choddal thu fein,* 90

*“ A nighean Inis-uaine nan colg.” \**

*Gu garg mhosguil an toman :*

*O ’n oigh thuit a ceann-bheairt sìos :*

*Ta am fathrom air carraig nan sruth.*

#### MR MACPHERSON’S

She saw him, amidst his arms, that gleamed in heaven’s fire. She saw him dim in his locks, that rose to nightly wind. Away, for fear, she turned her steps. “ Why should the king of Erin awake? Thou art not the

\* Here occur the terms *nam Bolg*, applied to that part of Ireland which formed the kingdom of Cathmor, and *nan Colg*, applied to the country of Suilvala, who, inspired by love, had followed him in disguise.



She beheld him *armed* in hard steel,  
 Gleaming in the brightness of the stars. 85  
 She beheld him, with his bushy (heavy) locks  
 Rising on the sighs of the sky.

She turned aside her steps, in fear:—  
 “Why,” *said she to herself*, “should I awaken the  
 king of Erin?”

“Thou art not in the dreams of his sleep, 90  
 “Daughter of warlike Inisuaine.”\*

Fiercely, *again*,† awoke the sound.  
 From the maiden fell her helmet down.  
 The sound is from the rock of streams.

## TRANSLATION.

“dream of his rest, daughter of Inisuaine.”

More dreadful rung the shield. Suilmalla starts. Her  
 helmet falls. *Loud echoed Lubar’s rock, as over it rolled*  
*the steel.*‡

† This is the third alarm of Fingal’s shield.

‡ Of the bombast here marked in italics, there is nothing in  
 the original.

<i>Plaosgadh o' aislin na h' oiche,</i>	95
<i>Ghluais Cathmor fu chrann fein.*</i>	
<i>Chunnaic e an oigh bu tla,</i>	
<i>Air carraig Lubhar nan sliabh;</i>	
<i>Dearg reul a sealladh sios</i>	
<i>'Measg siubhal a trom chiabh.</i>	100
<i>“ Cia 'ta roimh oiche gu Cathmor;†</i>	
<i>“ Ann cearr ‡ aimsir aislin fein? ”</i>	

## MR MACPHERSON'S

Bursting from the dreams of night, Cathmor half-rose,\*  
beneath his tree. He saw the form of the maid, above  
him, on the rock. A red star, with twinkling beam,

\* It must have occurred, that Mr Macpherson seems to be peculiarly fond of compounding his terms with the word *half*. This word, indeed, occurs *thrice* in the original of this Book. But Mr Macpherson *halves* every thing. “ They assumed,” is, with him, “ they half assumed;” “ her voice arose,” is, “ half arose;” “ sleep descended on his eyes,” is, “ his eyes were half closed in “ sleep.”

† Τις δ' ἔτω κάλα νῆας ἀνα στατον ἐρχεαι θίος

Νυκτα δι' ὀφθαίην————

’He, ” ἦc.

*Iliad*, lib. x. v. 82.

Bursting from the dreams of night, 95  
 Advanced Cathmor, from beneath his tree.\*  
 He beheld the gentle maiden,  
 Upon the rock of hilly Lubar :  
 A red star looked downwards,  
 Through the flowing of her bushy locks. 100  
 “ Who comes, through night, to Cathmor, †  
 “ In the sinistrous ‡ season of his dreams ?

---

## TRANSLATION.

looked through her floating hair.

“ Who comes through night to Cathmor, † in the sea-  
 “ son ‡ of his dreams ? Bringest thou aught of war ?

---

‡ The term *cearr* occurs twice in the original of this Book, in a very appropriate acceptation ; but, in neither instance is it translated, by Mr Macpherson, who probably did not understand it. *Cearr* signifies, in general, of any two things, or ways, the *wrong* one. Thus, in contradistinction to *straight*, it signifies *oblique* ; in opposition to *lucky*, it signifies *unlucky* ; in opposition to *right-handed*, it signifies *left-handed*. It is here rendered by *sinistrous*, *unlucky*, or *ominous*.

- “ *Am bheil fios duit air stri nan cruaidh bheum?*  
 “ *Cia thusa, mhic duibhre nan speur?*  
 “ *Na sheas thu am fiadhnuis an rìgh,* 105  
 “ *Do chaol thannas o’ nam o’ shean?*  
 “ *No ’n guth thu o’ neoil nam fras,*  
 “ *Le cunart Erin nan colg sean?”*  
     “ *Ni ’n fear suibhail mi fein;*  
 “ *Ni ’n guth mi o’ neoil nan gruaim:* 110  
 “ *Ach ’ta m’ fhocul le cunart na h’ Erin.*  
 “ *An cualas duit copan nam fuaim?*  
 “ *Ni ’n taibhs’ e, rìgh Atha nan sruth,*  
 “ *A thaomas an fhuaim air oiche.”*  
     “ *Taomadh an seod a ghuth fein:* 115  
 “ *’S fonn clarsaich do Chathmor an fhuaim:*  
  
 “ *’Ta aiteas, mhic duibhre nan speur,*

## MR MACPHERSON’S

- “ Who art thou, son of night? Standest thou before me,  
 “ a form of the times of old? A voice, from the fold of a  
 “ cloud, to warn me of Erin’s danger?”  
     “ Nor lonely scout am I, nor voice from folded cloud;  
 “ but I warn thee of the danger of Erin. Dost thou

“ Knowest thou of the strife of battle, (hard blows)?

“ Who art thou, son of the darkness of the sky?

“ Standest thou in the presence of the king, 105

“ A slender shade of the times of old?

“ Or art thou a voice, from the showery clouds,

“ *To tell* the danger of ancient Erin?”

“ No traveller am I,

“ Nor voice from the frowning clouds; 110

“ But my words are of the danger of Erin.

“ Didst thou hear the resounding boss?

“ It is no ghost, king of streamy Atha,

“ That pours the sound on night.”

“ Let the hero pour his voice 115

“ As the melody of the harp, is the sound to

Cathmor.

“ Joy, O son of the darkness of the sky,

## TRANSLATION.

“ hear that sound! It is not the feeble, king of Atha,

“ that rolls his signs on night.”

“ Let the warrior roll his signs; to Cathmor, they are

“ the sound of harps. My joy is great, voice of night,

- “ *Losgadh air m’anam gun ghruaim.\**  
 “ ‘*S e ceol chinn-fheadhna nan cruaidh bheum,*  
 “ *Am oiche, air aisrigh nan sian;* 120  
 “ ‘*Nuair a lasas anam nan sonn,*  
 “ *A chlann an cruadal do ’miann.*  
 “ ‘*Ta siol meata aig comhnuidh nam fiamh,*  
 “ *Ann gleannan nan osnadh tla;*  
 “ *Far an aom ceo-maidne ri sliabh,* 125  
  
 “ *O’ ghorm shuibhal sruthan nam blar.”*  
 “ *Ni ’meata, cheann-uithe nun sonn,*  
 “ *An sinsru’ on do thuit mi fein:*
- 

## MR MACPHERSON’S

“ and burns over all my thoughts.\* This is the music  
 “ of kings, on lonely hills, by night, when they light  
 “ their daring souls, the sons of mighty deeds. The  
 “ feeble dwell alone, in the valley of the breeze, where

---

\* From comparing the literal translation of the above four lines, or indeed of this whole passage, with that given by Mr Macpherson, it is presumed that it will appear evident, that, now tired of his labour, which had not been inconsiderable, he is ha-

“ Burns upon my unclouded soul.†  
 “ This is the music of hardy chieftains,  
 “ In the season of night, on the stormy hills, 120  
 “ When kindle the souls of the brave,  
 “ The race in hardships that delight;  
 “ The race of the timid dwell, in fear,  
 “ In the vale of soft breezes,  
 “ Where ascends the mist of the morning to the  
     hill, 125  
 “ From the blue course of the streams of the plain.”  
 “ Not timid, thou leader of the brave,  
 “ Were the fathers from whom I sprung.

---

## TRANSLATION.

“ mists lift their morning skirts, from the blue winding  
 “ stream.”  
 “ Not feeble, king of men, were they, the fathers of  
 “ my race.

---

stening towards a conclusion, by skimming over his subject, and  
 by omitting any image, or expression, which it might be difficult,  
 or troublesome, to him to render.

*“ Bu chomhnuidh dhoibh dubhra nan tonn,*

*“ Ann tir fhada ; siol cholgach nam beum. 130*

*“ Ach ni 'n solas do 'n' anam tla,*

*“ Fuaim mall a bhais o 'n raon.*

*“ Thig eisean nach geill gu brath :*

*“ Mosgail bard focail is caoin.”*

*Mar charraig, is sruthan ri taobh, 135*

*Ann fasaich nam faoin bheann,*

*Sheas Cathmor, ceann-feadhna nach maoin,*

*Ann deoir.*

*Mar oiteig, air anam, le bron,*

*Thanig guth caoin na h' oigh ; 140*

*Mosgladh cuimhn' talamh nam beann,*

*A caomh chomhnuidh, aig sruthain nan gleann ;*

*Roinh 'n an 'n d' thainig e gu borb,*

MR MACPHERSON'S

*“ They dwelt in the folds of battle, in their distant lands.*

*“ Yet delights not my soul in the signs of death! He,*

*“ who never yields, comes forth: O send the bard of*

*“ peace.”*



“ Their dwelling was in the dark *caverns* of the  
waves,

“ In a distant land ; a warlike race. 130

“ But my soft spirit has no delight

“ In the slow sound of death, on the plain.

“ He comes, who never yields.

“ Awaken the bard of mildest voice.”

Like a rock, over whose side a streamlet *trickles*,  
In the desert of low hills, 136

Stood Cathmor, valiant chief!

In tears.

Like a breeze, on his soul, sorrowfully,

Came the soft voice of the maiden ; 140

Awakening the memory of the land of mountains,

Her peaceful dwelling, by the streams of the vale,

Before he had come, in his wrath,

## TRANSLATION.

Like a dropping rock, in the desert, stood Cathmor,  
in tears. Her voice came, a breeze, on his soul, and  
waked the memory of her land ; where she dwelt by her  
peaceful streams, before he came

*Gu comhair Chonmhoir nan colg fiar.\**

- “ *A nighean choigreach nan lann,*” 145  
 (*Thionndc i a ceann o ’n t’ shonn :*)  
 “ *’S fadda fa ’m shuil, ann cruaidh,*  
 “ *Crann † flathail Inisuaime nan tonn.*  
 “ *’Ta ’m anam, do thubhairt mi fein,*  
 “ *Ann trusgan nan sian ciar.* 150  
 “ *C’arson a lasadh an dealra sho fhein,*  
 “ *Gus an pill mi, ann sith, on t’ shliabh?*

MR MACPHERSON’S

to the war of Conmor.\*

“ Daughter of strangers,” he said, (she, trembling, turned away,) “ long have I marked thee in thy steel,

\* I may be permitted to remark, that, in this passage, there occur, in the original, many affecting and inimitable beauties. Suilvala, who had become enamoured of Cathmor, during his residence in Inisuaime, her native land, follows him, in disguise. Prompted by her anxiety for his safety, she warns him, through night, of the military preparations of Fingal; but he disdains every thought of fear. She betrays her sex, by her timidity and alarm. Cathmor instantly recognizes her, under her disguise, and is deeply affected on the occasion. By a most exquisite simile,

To the aid of warlike (of the inverted bristles)  
 Conmor.\*

“ Thou daughter of strangers of swords,      145  
 (She turned her head aside from the hero,)  
 “ Long, under my eye, in armour,  
 “ Has been the fair branch † of billowy Inisuaine.  
 “ My soul, (said I to myself)  
 “ Is *folded* in a robe of dusky storms.      150  
 “ Why should this light kindle,  
 “ Until I return in peace from the mountain ?

## TRANSLATION.

“ young pine † of Inishuna. But my soul, (I said,) is  
 “ folded in a storm. Why should that beam arise, till  
 “ my steps return in peace ?

he is compared to “ a rock, over whose side a streamlet *trickles*,” indicating, at once, the firmness, and the gentleness, of his nature. The whole of his subsequent deportment towards Suilvala, displays a spirit of tenderness and generosity, which would do honour to human nature, in any period of society. Much of this beauty is lost in Mr Macpherson’s translation.

† *Cran* signifies a tree, or a branch of a tree. Mr Macpherson unwarrantably specifies the tree, and makes it a pine.

“ *Na ghlais m' aghaidh an t' fhlianus a lamh geal,*

“ *'S tu togail do 'm eagal an righ?*

“ *S' am cunairt, ainnir nan trom chiabh,* 155

“ *Am do 'm 'anam; mor-thalla nan stri: †*

“ *Ataidh se, domhail mar shruth,*

“ *Taomadh air Gaidheal ‡ nan cruaidh bheum.*

“ *Aig taobh carraig chosach air Lona,*

“ *Mu chaochan nan sruthan crom,* 160

“ *Glas, ann ciabha na h' aois,*

#### MR MACPHERSON'S

“ Have I been pale in thy presence, when thou bidst  
 “ me to fear the king? The time of danger, O maid, is  
 “ the season of my soul; † for then it swells a mighty

† Besides numerous omissions and suppressions in this passage, I observe, that Mr Macpherson has entirely neglected to render the last clause of this line, *mor-thalla nan stri*, probably because he did not understand its application. It implies, that the soul of Cathmor was the hall, or seat, of warlike sentiments.

“ Did my visage turn pale in thy presence, white  
handed *maid*?

“ That thou shouldst raise, to alarm me, the king,  
(Fingal.) 154

“ The season of danger, maid of the bushy locks,  
“ Is the season of my soul,—great seat of battles,—†  
“ It swells large, like a stream,  
“ Pouring down upon the hardy Gaels.‡  
“ By the side of a cavernous rock, on Lona,  
“ Near the gurgling of winding streams, 160  
“ Gray, in his locks of age,

## TRANSLATION.

“ stream, and rolls me on the foe.‡  
“ Beneath the moss-covered rock of Lona, near his  
“ own blue stream, gray, in his locks of age,

‡ This is the only passage, in the originals that I have seen, where the people of Fingal are specifically denominated *Gaels*, the name by which the Scots Highlanders designate themselves at this day. It is important to remark this, with a view to the claims of Ireland to Fingal and his people. Mr Macpherson loses this in his translation.

- “ ’*Ta Claon-mhal, rìgh clarsich nam fonn.*  
 “ O’ s cionn, ’*ta crann darraich nam fuaim,*  
 “ Agus suibhal nan ruadh-bhoc sliom.  
 “ ’*Ta fathrom na strì na chluais,* 165  
 “ ’*S e g’ aomadh ann smuainte nach tiom.\**  
 “ *Ann sin bithidh do thalla, Shuibmhala,*  
 “ *Gus an islich fathrom nam beum.*  
 “ *Gus am pill mi, ann lasadh nan cruaidh,*  
 “ O’ thrusgan duibhre na beinn; 170  
 “ O’ n cheathrach a thrusas o Lona,  
 “ *Mu chomhnuidh mo ruin fein.” †*  
     *Thuit gath soluis air anam na h’ oigh;*

## MR MACPHERSON’S

“ dwells Claonmal, king of harps. Above him is his  
 “ echoing tree, and the dun bounding of roes. The  
 “ noise of our strife reaches his ear, as he bends in his  
 “ thoughts of years.\* There let thy rest be, Suilmalla,

\* *Smuainte nach tiom*; that is, “ thoughts not gentle and pleasan-  
 “ sant, but grieved and sad.” This Mr Macpherson unwarrantably  
 “ translates, “ thoughts of years.”

" Is Claon-mal, chief (king) of the melodious harp.  
 " Above is a rustling oak,  
 " And the haunts (courses) of the sleek roe.  
 " The din of the battle is in his ear, 165  
 " As he bends in his thoughts of grief.\*  
 " There shall be thy residence, Suilvala,  
 " Till the noise of the battle (of the blows) subsides;  
 " Till I return in the blaze of my armour,  
 " From the skirt of the mountain's shade; 170  
 " From the mist that gathers on Lona,  
 " Around the dwelling of my love." †  
 A beam of light fell on the soul of the maiden,

---

## TRANSLATION.

" until our battle cease; until I return in my arms, from  
 " the skirts of the evening mist, that rises on Lona,  
 " round the dwelling of my love." †  
 A light fell on the soul of the maid;

---

† The conclusion of Cathmor's speech is highly poetical and tender.

*Las i suas fa chomhair an rìgh:\**

*Thionnda i a h' aghaidh ri Cathmor,*

175

*A ciabhag ann 's na h' osna a strì.*

*“ Reubar iulair nan speur ard*

*“ O' mhor-shruth gaoith nan gleann,*

*“ 'Nuair a chi i na rua-bhuic fa comhair,*

*“ Clann-eilde nam faoin-bheann;*

180

*“ Mun tionnda Cathmor nan cruaidh bheum,*

*“ O' n strì mun cirich an dan.†*

*“ Faceams thu, ghaisgich nan geur lann,*

#### MR MACPHERSON'S

it rose, kindled, before the king.\* She turned her face to Cathmor, from amidst her waving locks. “ Sooner shall the eagle of heaven be torn from the stream of his roaring wind, when he sees the dun prey before

\* In the first line, much beauty is lost, by suppressing the “ beam” of light; and, in the second, the translation is false. It was not the “ light,” but Suilvala, on whom “ the beam of light” had fallen, that “ kindled,” or brightened, “ before the king.”



She brightened in the presence of the king.\*  
 She turned her countenance towards Cathmor, 175  
 Her locks struggling in the breeze.

“ Sooner,” *said she*, “ shall be torn the eagle of  
 the lofty sky,

“ From the swelling stream of wind, in the vale,

“ When she sees the roes before her,

“ The bounding sons of the low hills, 180

“ Than the warlike Cathmor shall turn away

“ From the battle, which shall rise in song.†

“ Let me behold thee, hero of the sharp swords,

## TRANSLATION.

“ him, the young sons of the bounding roe, than thou,

“ O Cathmor, be turned from the strife of renown.†

“ Soon may I see thee, warrior,

† In translating this beautiful and energetic simile, it must be acknowledged, that Mr Macpherson has been uncommonly successful. He has caught the idea of his original very forcibly. Still, however, there is too much of *his own*. There is nothing in the Gaelic of “ roaring” wind, or “ dun prey.”

- “ O’ thrusgan an duibhre dhuibh,  
 “ ’Nuair a thogas ceo mum chomhnuidh fein 185  
 “ Air Lona, nan iomadh sruth.  
 “ ’Nuair is fadda o’ m shuilean thu, sheoid,  
 “ Buail copan nam fuaim ard.  
 “ Pillidh solas do m’ anam, ’s e ’n ceo,  
 “ ’S mi g’ aomadh air carraig leam fein. 190  
 “ Ach mo thuit thu, marri coigrich ata mi ;  
 “ Thigeadh do ghuth o neoil,  
 “ Gu oigh Inisuaine, ’s i fann.”  
 “ Og-gheug Lunnoin an fheoir,  
 “ C’ uime dh’ aomadh tu ’n strachda nan sian, 195  
 “ Dubh thaomadh air aghaidh nan sliabh?

## MR MACPHERSON’S

“ from the skirts of the evening mist, when it is rolled  
 “ around me, on Lona of the streams. While yet thou  
 “ art distant far, Cathmor, strike the shield, that joy may  
 “ return to my darkened soul. as I lean on the mossy  
 “ rock; but, if thou shouldst fall, I am in a land of

- " From my robe of dusky gloom,  
 " When the mist rises about my dwelling,      185  
 " At Lona of many streams.  
 " When thou art far from my sight, O hero,  
 " Strike the loud resounding boss :  
 " Joy will return to my clouded soul,  
 " Whilst I bend, lonely, over the rock.      190  
 " But, if thou fallest, I am with strangers :  
 " Let thy voice come from the clouds,  
 " To the maid of Inisuaine, when she is low."  
     " Youthful branch of grassy Lumom,  
 " Why shouldst thou sink in the bursting of the  
                     storm,      195  
 " Dark pouring over the face of the mountains ?
- 

## TRANSLATION.

- " strangers; O send thy voice, from thy cloud, to the  
 " maid of Inishuna."  
     " Young branch of green-headed Lumon, why dost  
 " thou shake in the storm ?

- “ ’Stric thionnda Cathmor o ’n bhlar ;\*  
 “ Mar mheallain dhamh fein tha sleagh nan lot,  
 “ ’S iad pronnadh air cos nan sgiath :  
 “ Dh’ eiream am sholus o ’n stri, 200  
 “ Mar thein-oiche, o’ thaomadh nan nial.  
 “ Na pill, a dheo-greine, o ’n ghlcann,  
 “ ’Nuair a dhluthicheas fathrom nan colg :  
 “ ’Eagal teicheadh do ’n namhaid o ’m laimh,  
 “ Mar theich iad o shins’ ra nam Bolg:— 205
- 

## MR MACPHERSON’S

- “ often has Cathmor returned from darkly-rolling wars.\*  
 “ The darts of death are but hail to me; they have often  
 “ bounded from my shield. I have risen, brighten-  
 “ ed, from battle, like a meteor from a stormy cloud.
- 

\* In the original before me, the verse,

“ Dark pouring over the face of mountains,”

which evidently refers to “ the bursting of the storm,” mentioned in verse 195, is placed after the verse

“ Often has Cathmor returned from the field.”

" Often has Cathmor returned from the field.\*  
 " As hail are the wounding spears to me,  
 " As they crash upon the bosses of the shields.  
 " I have risen, as a light, from the contest;   200  
 " As a meteor of night, from the bursting cloud.  
 " Return not, sun-beam, from the vale,  
 " When the din of the encounter thickens :  
 " Lest the enemy should escape from my hand,  
 " As they escaped from my fathers of the Bolgi :—

---

## TRANSLATION.

" Return not, fair beam, from thy vale, when the roar of  
 " battle grows : then might the foe escape, as from my  
 " fathers of old.

---

This mistake of the reciter, or transcriber, is corrected, and the confusion occasioned, in the sense of this passage, removed. Mr Macpherson, who generally gives himself no trouble about such difficulties, applies the verse, in the order that it stands, to " wars," and gives us the bombastic phrase " dark-rolling."

- “ \**Chualas le Sonmor air Cluanar,*  
 “ *A thuit fa Chormag, nan geur lann;*  
 “ *Tri laethe dhorchaich an righ,*  
  
 “ *Mu ’n fhear a dh’ aom ann stri nan gleann.*  
 “ *Chunnaic minbhean an sonn ann ceo;* 210  
 “ *Phrosnaich sud dith siubhal gu sliabh.*  
 “ *Thog i a bogha, fos n’ iosal,*  
 “ *Gu dol mar-ri laoch nan sgiath.†*  
 “ *Do ’n ainnir luidh duibhre air Atha*  
 “ *’Nuair a shiubhail an gaisgeach gu gnìomh.* 215
- 

## MR MACPHERSON’S

“ They told to Sonmor of Cluanar, who was slain by  
 “ Cormac in fight. Three days darkened Sonmor, over  
 “ his brother’s fall. His spouse beheld the silent king,

---

\* Here Cathmor, to persuade Suilvala to remain in her retreat until the battle should be over, artfully introduces, and relates, an instance, in the history of one of his ancestors, in which the interference of a lady had interrupted the tide of victory, and given the enemy an opportunity to escape.

- “ \* Sonmor had heard of Cluanar, *his brother*, 206  
 “ Who fell under Cormag of sharp swords.  
 “ For three days, *the visage of* the king was dark-  
     ened,  
 “ For the man who fell in the strife of the vale.  
 “ His gentle spouse beheld the hero in darkness: 210  
 “ This moved her to travel to the mountain.  
 “ She took up her bow, in secret,  
 “ To accompany the hero of shields.†  
 “ *For*, to the fair one lay darkness on Atha,  
 “ When the warrior departed to action.      215
- 

## TRANSLATION.

- “ and foresaw his steps to war. She prepared the bow,  
 “ in secret, to attend her blue-shielded hero.† To her  
 “ dwelt darkness in Atha, when he was not there.
- 

† Of the colour of the shield, we have nothing in the original. The whole of this passage, especially the last verse, is feebly translated by Mr Macpherson.

“ *O cheud sruthan aonach na h' oiche,\**

“ *Thaom siol Alnecma sios.*

“ *Chualas sgiath chaismachd an righ;*

“ *Mhosguil an anam gu stri.*

“ *Bha an suibhal am fathrom nan lann,* 220

“ *Gu Ullin, talamh nan crann.*

“ *Bhuail Sonmor, air uairibh, an sgiath,*

“ *—Ccann feadhna nam borb thriath.*

“ *Nan diaigh lean Suitaluin,*

“ *Air aomadh nam fras.* 225

“ *Bu sholus is' air an aonach,*

#### MR MACPHERSON'S

“ From their hundred streams, by night,\* poured  
 “ down the sons of Alnecma. They had heard the  
 “ shield of the king, and their rage arose. In clanging  
 “ arms, they moved along, towards Ullin of the groves.

\* I am uncertain whether I am correct in this translation.  
 “ *Aonach na h' oiche*” signifies, literally, “ the mountain of night.”  
 Whether the poet means, “ by night,” as Mr Macpherson, conve-



- “ From an hundred streams of the dusky\* moun-  
 tain,  
 “ Poured the race of Alnecma down.  
 “ They had heard the call of the shield of the king;  
 “ Their souls awakened to the encounter.  
 “ They travelled, in the din of swords, 220  
 “ Towards Ullin, the land of trees.  
 “ Sonmor struck, at times, his shield,—  
 “ Chief of ferocious tribes.  
 “ After them followed Suilaluin,  
 “ Upon the showery slopes *of the hills*. 225  
 “ She was a light upon the mountain,
- 

## TRANSLATION.

- “ Sonmor struck his shield, at times, the leader of the  
 “ war.  
 “ Far behind followed Suilallin, over the streamy hills.  
 “ She was a light on the mountain,
- 

uiently omitting the term “ mountain,” renders it, or whether  
 “ of night,”—dark, or dusky,—be intended, as an epithet, is  
 doubtful.

“ ’Nuair a thaom iad air gcanntai glas :

“ Tu a ceumna flathail air lom,

“ ’Nuair a thog iad ri aghaidh nan tom.\*

“ B’ eagal di sealla an righ, 230

“ A dh’ fhug i ann Atha nam fri.†

“ ’Nuair a dh’ eirich fathrom nam beum,

“ ’S a thaom iad ’s a cheile ’s a chath,

“ Loisg Sonmor, mar theine nan spur ;

“ Thanig Snialaluin nam flath : ‡ 235

“ A folta sgavilte ’s an ossag ;

MR MACPHERSON’S

“ when they crossed the vale below. Her steps were  
 “ stately on the vale, when they rose on the mossy  
 “ hills.\* She feared the approach of the king, who left  
 “ her in echoing † Atha. But when the roar of battle

\* How faintly is the contrast marked, in Mr Macpherson’s translation, between the course of Snialaluin, and that of her husband and his troops; she avoiding him, by travelling along the hills, when he was in the valley; and by travelling on the plain, whilst he marched along the hills?

† The term *fri*, here translated “ *grassy*,” signifies, literally, “ *deer-pastures*,” and is the term still used, in many parts of the

- “ When they descended to the gray vales:  
 “ Her steps were stately on the plain,  
 “ When they ascended the face of the hills.\*  
 “ *For* she dreaded the looks of the king,      230  
 “ Who had left her behind in grassy † Atha.  
     “ When the din of battle (blows) arose,  
 “ And they mingled together in the contest,  
 “ Sonmor blazed like the fire of the sky.  
 “ Suilalain, the fair, ‡ came forward :      235  
 “ Her hair spread out in the gale :
- 

## TRANSLATION.

- “ rose; when host was rolled on host; when Sonmor  
 “ burnt like the fire of heaven in clouds, with her  
 “ spreading hair came Suilallin :
- 

Highlands, for those tracts which are reserved for deer, called fo-rests. It is evident, that Mr Macpherson did not understand the expression; but it is not easy to conjecture, how he stumbled upon the unmeaning epithet, *echoing*, which he substitutes in its room.

‡ “ *Nam flath*,” the excellent, the beautiful.

- “ *A h' anam ag osparn mu 'n righ.*  
 “ *Dh' aom e an stri, mu run nan laoch ; \**  
 “ *Theich an namhaid fa dhuibhre nan speur.*  
 “ *Luidh Cluanar gun fhuil ; †* 240  
 “ *Gun fhuil, ann tigh caol gun leus.*  
   “ *Ni 'n d' eirich fearg Shonmhoir nan lann,*  
 “ *Bha laethe gu dorch 's gu mall :*  
 “ *Ghluais Suilaluin ma gorm shruth fein,*  
 “ *A suil ann reachda nan deur.* 245  
 “ *Bu lionmhor a sealladh, gu caoin,*  
 “ *Air gaisgeach samhach nach faoin.*  
 “ *Ach thionnda i a suilean tla,*  
 “ *O' shealladh an laoich thuadail.*

## MR MACPHERSON'S

- “ for she trembled for her king. He stopped the rush-  
 “ ing strife to save the love of heroes.\* The foe fled by  
 “ night. Cluanar slept without his blood; † the blood  
 “ which ought to be poured upon the warrior's tomb.  
 “ Nor rose the rage of Sonmor; but his days were

\* That is:—in order to save her from being hurt in the encounter.

- “ Her soul throbbing for the king.  
 “ He declined the combat, for the love of heroes.\*  
 “ The enemy fled, under the darkness of the sky.  
 “ Cluanar lay without blood; † 240  
 “ Without blood, in the narrow torchless house.  
 “ Nor rose the wrath of Sonmor of swords;  
 “ But his days were dark and tedious.  
 “ Suilaluin walked by her own blue stream,  
 “ Her eye ever bursting in tears. 245  
 “ Frequent were her looks, most mild,  
 “ Towards the silent chief.  
 “ But she turned aside her soft eyes,  
 “ From the looks of the gloomy hero.

## TRANSLATION.

“ silent and dark. Suilallin wandered by her gray  
 “ streams, with her tearful eyes. Often did she look on  
 “ the hero, when he was folded in his thoughts. But  
 “ she shrunk from his eyes, and turned her lone steps  
 “ away.

† That is:—without his revenge. Mr Macpherson’s translation  
 of the next line is a feeble paraphrase.

“ *Mhosguil blair, mar fhathrom nan nial;* 250

“ *Ghluais doruin o’ anam mor.*

“ *Chuncas a ccumna le h’ aiteas,*

“ *’S a lamh gheal air clarsich uam fonn.\**

*Na chruaidh ghluais an rìgh gun dail:*

*Bhuail e u’ sgiath chosach, ard,* 255

*Gu h’ ard, air darrach nan sian*

*Aig Lubhar nan iomadh sruth.†*

*Seachd copain bha air an sgeith,*

*Seachd focail an rìgh da shluagh;*

MR MACPHERSON’S

“ Battles rose like a tempest, and drove the mist from

“ his soul. He beheld, with joy, her steps in the hall,

“ and the white rising of her hands on the harp.”\*

\* Here ends the episode, introduced by Cathmor, to persuade Suilvala to remain in her concealment, until the engagement should be over. The poet then proceeds to describe Cathmor, advancing to battle, in his armour. But, to divert the tediousness of the remaining hours of night, he summons the Bards; and bears the song of Fonnar, in which he relates the naval expedition of Larthon.

" Wars awoke, like the noise of clouds : 250  
 " Grief departed from his mighty soul.  
 " He beheld, *at length*, her steps with delight,  
 " And her fair hand on the harp of melody."\*  
 In armour, hastily advanced the king ;  
 He struck the shield, bossy, high ; 255  
 High upon the oak of storms,  
 At Lubar of many streams.†  
 Seven bosses were on the shield ;  
 The seven voices (words) of the king to his hosts,

---

## TRANSLATION.

In his arms, strode the chief of Atha, to where his  
 shield hung high, in night ; high on a mossy bough,  
 over Lubar's streamy roar.† Seven bosses rose on the  
 shield ; the seven voices of the king,

---

† In Mr Macpherson's translation of these verses, we have a striking instance of his preposterous attempt to embellish the original with his own bombast. There is nothing, in the original, of "night," or "mossy bough." "Streamy roar" seems to be a very absurd expression.

<i>A thaomadh air osnadh nan speur</i>	260
<i>Air fineachaibh mór nam Bolg.</i>	
<i>Air gach copan 'ta reul d'on oiche;</i>	
<i>Ceann-mathon, nan rosg gun sgleo;</i>	
<i>Caol-darna, o' neoil aig eiridh;</i>	
<i>Iul-oiche, ann trusgan do cheo;</i>	265
<i>'Ta Caoin-challin, air carraig a dehra;</i>	
<i>Reul-dubhra, air gorm thonn o 'n iar;</i>	
<i>Leth-chealach a soluis 'san uisg;</i>	
<i>'Ta Bear-thein', las-shuil nan sliabh,</i>	
<i>Sealladh sìos o' choille san aonach,</i>	270
<i>Air mall shuibhal sealgair, 's e triall.*</i>	
<i>Roimh ghleannan an duibhre bhraonich</i>	

## MR MACPHERSON'S

which his warriors received from the wind, and marked over all their tribes.

On each boss is placed a star of night; Can-mathon, with beams unshorn; Coldarna, rising from a cloud; Uloicho, robed in mist; and the soft beam of Cathlin,

\* It is obvious, that, in the above passage, the "marking" of the sounds of the shield, the "laughing" of Reldurath, and the



That poured on the sighs of the sky, 260  
 Upon the mighty tribes of the Bolgi.

On every boss is a star of night :

*Can-mathon*, of unsullied eye (beam ;)

*Col-darna*, from clouds arising ;

*Uloiche*, in a robe of mist ; 265

*Caon-callin*, glittering on a rock ;

*Reuldura*, on a blue wave in the west,

Half concealing her light in the deep ;

*Berthein*, the bright eye of the mountains,

Looking down from a wood on the slope, 270

On the slow course of the hunter, as he travels \*

Through the vale of showery gloom,

## TRANSLATION.

glittering on a rock ; laughing on its own blue wave,  
 Reldurath half-sinks its western light ; the red eye of  
 Berthein looks, through a grove, on the hunter, as he re-  
 turns, by night,\*

\* "redness" of Berthein's eye, are all interpolations of Mr Macpherson.

*Le faobh rua-bhuic nan leum arid.*

*Domhail, am meadhon an sgeith,*

*'Ta lasadh Tonn-theine, gun neoil,*

275

*Au rionnag a sheall, roimh n' oiche,*

*Air Learthon a chuain mhoir ;\**

MR MACPHERSON'S

with the spoils of the bounding roe. Wide, in the midst,  
arose the cloudless beam of Ton-thena, that star which

\* There occurs, perhaps, no passage, in all the poems ascribed to Ossian, which seems to afford a fairer field for scepticism, than this astronomical description of Cathmor's shield. It appears, at first sight, to be a transcript of Homer's description of the shield of Achilles, (Il. xviii. v. 478.) and by far too refined for the period of Ossian.

I shall only beg leave to remark, that the astronomy of this passage extends no farther than what is well known to be common and ordinary, in the Highlands, at this day. In a country, where clocks and almanacks are not frequent, the rising of the Pleiades not only indicates the season of the year, but their progress in the sky shews the hour of night: the revolution of the Northern Bear is, at this day, the horary of the Highlanders: the phases of the moon are minutely attended to by every shepherd and peasant.

The subject is important, and may excuse a short digression. It is remarkable, that, in the representation of the zodiac, given

With the spoils of the high-bounding roe.  
 Large, in the middle of the shield,  
 Blazes *Tonthena*, without a cloud ; 275  
 The star, that looked down through night,  
 On Larthon, of the mighty ocean ;\*

## TRANSLATION.

looked, by night, on the course of the sea-tossed Larthon.\*

by Denon, from an Egyptian ceiling, whilst there occurs much resemblance to that of the Greeks, there are to be found, at the same time, such striking dissimilarities, as would seem to authorize the opinion, that men, in very different ages and countries, have entertained similar imaginations, and formed very similar assortments of the constellations, without any mutual communication, or concert. There is, it would seem, something in the arrangement of the constellations, which will naturally strike every eye in a somewhat similar manner. The *Bear*, the *Canis Major*, *Orion*, *Bootes*, the *Bull*, &c. have, from the remotest antiquity, attracted the attention of men; and, it is probable, that they have been designated, by nearly similar figures, in very distant nations and periods. The knowledge of them is common in the Highlands, and was probably more so in ancient times, when the Caledonians undertook long voyages, and were accustomed to traverse vast forests and lofty mountains, both by day and by night.

*Learthon, ceann feadhna nam Bolg,  
 An ceud fhear a shuibhail air gaoith.  
 Leathan sgaoileadh seoit bhan an rìgh, 280  
 Gu Inisfail nan iomadh sruth.  
 Thaom oiche air aghaidh a chuain,  
 Agus ceathach nan trusgan dubh;  
 Bha gaoith caochlu gu dlu 's an speur;  
 Leum loingear o thonn gu tonn, 285  
 'Nuair a dh' eirich Tonn-theine nan stuagh;\*  
 A caoin shealladh o' bhristeadh nan nial.*

---

MR MACPHERSON'S

Larthon, the first of Bolga's race, who travelled on the winds. White-bosomed, spread the sails of the king, towards streamy Inisfail. Dun night was rolled before him, with its skirts of mist. Unconstant blew the winds,

---

Were I allowed to offer a conjecture, with regard to the stars that adorned Cathmor's shield, I should say, that *Cean-mathon*, rendered, by Mr Macpherson, "the Bear's Head," is *Sirius*, in *Canis Major*:—there is no remarkable star in the *Bear's Head*. Mr Macpherson translates *Utoicho*, "the ruler of night," falsely:—it is, "the guide of night," and, probably, means the *Polar star*. *Caoin-challin*, literally, "the mild maiden," is perhaps

Learthon, the chieftain of the Bolgi,  
 The first man that travelled on winds.  
 Wide spread were the white sails of the king, 280  
 Towards Inisfail of many streams.  
 Night poured upon the face of the main,  
 And the vapour of dusky robes ;  
 The winds shifted rapidly in the sky ;  
 The vessel bounded from wave to wave, 285  
 When rose Tonthena of the billows ;\*  
 Her mild look was from the bursting clouds.

---

 TRANSLATION.

and rolled him from wave to wave. Then rose the  
 fiery haired Ton-thena, and laughed \* from her parted  
 cloud.

---

the bright star in *Spica Virginis*. *Reldura* is, perhaps, the setting  
*Evening-star* ; for, it is not likely, that a distinction was then made  
 between the fixed stars and the planets.

\* The "fiery hair," and the "laughing" of Ton-thena, are al-  
 together Mr Macpherson's.

*B' aiteas do Learthon tein-iuil nam buadh,*

*A dealradh air domhan nan sian.*

*Fuidh shleagh Cathmor nan colg sean,* 290

*Dhuisg an guth a dhuisgeadh bard.\**

*Thaom iad dubh, o thuobh nan sliabh,*

*Le clarsich ghrinn 's gach laimh.*

*Le aiteas mor, sheas rompa an righ,*

*Mar fhear-siubhail, ri teas la,† ann gleann,* 295

*N' nair a chluinneas e fadha 's an reidh,*

*Caoin thorman sruthain nam beam;*

MR MACPHERSON'S

Larthon blessed the well-known beam, as it faintly gleamed on the deep.

Beneath the spear of Cathmor rose that voice, which awakens bards.\* They came, dark-winding, from every

\* That is :—Cathmor summoned the bards to amuse him with their songs in the night.

Welcome (joy) to Larthon was the fiery guide to  
victory,

Shining on the ocean of storms.

Beneath the spear of Cathmor, of ancient feats,  
Awoke the voice that awakens bards.\* 291

They poured down, dark, from the skirts of the  
hills,

Each with fine *strung* harp in his hand.

With much joy, stood before them the king,

Like a traveller, during the heat of the day,† in  
the valley, 295

When he hears, afar, in the plain,

The soft murmurs of the mountain streams ;

TRANSLATION.

side, each with the sound of his harp. Before them re-  
joiced the king, as the traveller, in the day of the sun,†  
when he hears, far-rolling around, the murmur of mossy  
streams ;

† “ The day of the sun” is one of Mr Macpherson’s fine expres-  
sions, totally unwarranted by the simplicity of the original.  
“ Far-rolling” is of the same kind.

- Sruthain a bhriseas 's an fhasaich,*  
*O' charraig thaobh-ghlas nan ruadh-bhoc.*  
 " *C' arson a chluinneam guth an rìgh,\** 300  
 " *N' am coddail, ann oiche nam fras?*  
 " *Am facas tannais nach beo,*  
 " *'Measg t' aislin, aig aomadh glas?*  
 " *Air neoil bheil an comhuidh fuar,*  
 " *Feitheamh fonn Fhonnair nam fleagh? †* 305  
 " *'S lionmhor an siubhal air reidh,*  
 " *Far an tog an siol an t' shleagh.*  
 " *No 'n eirich ar cronan air thus,*

## MR MACPHERSON'S

streams that burst, in the desert, from the rock of roes.

"Why," said Fonnar, "hear we the voice of the king,\* in the season of his rest? Were the dim forms

\* Fonnar, one of the bards, addresses Cathmor.

† The exquisite beauty, and characteristic imagery, of the last four verses of the original, are miserably lost in Mr Macpherson's translation. He seems not indeed to have caught the sense of the



Streams that burst in the desert,  
From the gray-sided rock of roes.

“ Why do I hear the voice of the king,\* 300  
“ In the season of sleep, during the showery night?  
“ Hast thou beheld the ghosts of the dead,  
“ Amidst thy dreams, descending gray?  
“ Amongst the clouds is their dwelling cold,  
“ Awaiting the song of Fonnar of feasts.† 305  
“ Frequent are their visits (courses) on the plain,  
“ Where their offspring lift the spear.  
“ Or shall our song first arise,

---

## TRANSLATION.

“ of thy fathers bending in thy dreams? Perhaps they  
“ stand on that cloud, and wait for Fonnar’s song: †  
“ often they come to the fields, where their sons are to  
“ lift the spear. Or shall our voice arise,

---

passage, and glosses it with the first easy expression that occurred, according to the practice ascribed to him by his friend Mr Morison.

- “ *Mun fhear nach tog an t' shleadh gu brath,*  
 “ *Fear-chosgairt, air gleann nan slogh* 310  
 “ *O Mhoma nan ioma bad?*  
   “ *Ni 'n dichuimhn' dhamh dorcha nam blar,\**  
 “ *Chinn-fheadhna nam bard o' thus.*  
 “ *Togar cloch dha aig Lubhar nan carn,*  
  
 “ *Aite eomhuaidh do dh' Fholda, 's do chiu.* 315  
 “ *Ach taom 'm anam air am nan laoch;*  
 “ *Air na bliadhna 's ann d' eirich siad suas,*  
 “ *Air tonn Inisuaime nan colg.*
- 

## MR MACPHERSON'S

“ for him, who lifts the spear no more; he that consu-  
 “ med the field, from Moma of the groves?”

“ \*Not forgot is that cloud of war, bard of other  
 “ times. High shall his tomb rise, on Moi-lena, the

---

\* Cathmor speaks. Fonnar had proposed to sing the achievements of Folda. Cathmor, whilst he professes a high esteem for that hero, to whom he promises to erect a monument, requests the bard to take another subject for his song, and to relate the expedition of Larthon. It appears pretty evident, that Mr Macpher-

- “ Of the man, who shall lift the spear no more,  
 “ The destroyer *of the enemy* in the populous vale;  
 “ *The man* from Moma of many groves?” 311  
 “ I forget not that darkener of battles,\*  
 “ Thou chief of the bards of old.  
 “ A stone shall be raised to him at Lubar of mo-  
     numents;  
 “ A dwelling to Folda; and he shall have his fame.  
 “ But pour my soul on the times of heroes; 316  
 “ On the years, in which they *first* arose,  
 “ On the waves of warlike Inisuaine.
- 

## TRANSLATION.

- “ dwelling of renown. But now roll back my soul to the  
 “ times of my fathers; to the years when first they rose,  
 “ on Inis-huna’s waves.
- 

son has misunderstood this whole passage, which has some diffi-  
 culty. Where did he find his *Moi-lena*? Why did he omit the  
 name of Folda, whose actions Fonnar had proposed to sing?  
 Why does he always mistranslate *taom* “to pour, (verse 316.) to  
*roll*?

“ *Ni ’n aiteas do Chathmor amhain,*  
 “ *Cuimhne Lumoin inis-uaine nan slogh;\** 320

“ *Lumoin, talamh nan sruth,*  
 “ *Caoin-chomhnuidh nam ban-bhroilleach oigh.”*

#### FONNAR’S SONG.

“ † *Lumoin nan sruth!*  
 “ *Tha thu dealradh air m’ anam fein;*  
 “ *Tha do ghrian air do thaobh,* 325  
 “ *Air carraig nan crann bu trom.*

---

#### MR MACPHERSON’S

“ Nor alone pleasant to Cathmor is the remembrance of  
 “ wood-covered \* Lumon; Lumon of the streams, the  
 “ dwelling of white-bosomed maids.”

---

\* The ἐυναίομενον of Homer: Mr Macpherson’s “ wood-cover-  
 “ ed,” is a shameful mistranslation.

" Nor delightful to Cathmor, alone,  
 " Is the memory of Lumoin, well-peopled \* island  
     of verdure ;   320  
 " Lumoin ! the territory of streams,  
 " The sweet abode of white-bosomed maids."

## FONNAR'S SONG

" † Lumoin of streams !  
 " Thou brightenest upon my soul :  
 " Thy sun is on thy side,                                     325  
 " On the rock of stately (heavy) trees.

## TRANSLATION.

" † Lumon of the streams ! thou risest on Fonnar's  
 " soul : thy sun is on thy side, on the rocks of thy bend-  
 " ing trees.

---

† Here the bard, Fonnar, begins his song, and relates, in a most harmonious lyric strain, the expedition of Larthon, already alluded to in the description of Cathmor's shield.

- “ *Tha t’ eilid chiar;*  
 “ *Do dhearg bar-mhor measg nam bad,*  
 “ *A faicin air sliabh,*  
 “ *An colg-chu siubhal grad.\** 330  
 “ *Mall, air an reidh,*  
 “ *’Ta ceumna na’ noigh;*  
 “ *Oigh lamh gheal nan teud,*  
 “ *’S am bogha crom, ’s a mhagh,*  
 “ *Togail an gorm shuil tla,* 335  
 “ *O ’n leadan bhar-bhuidh air sliabh nam flath.*

“ *Ni ’m bheil ceumna Learthuinn ’s a bheinn,*

---

MR MACPHERSON’S

“ The dun roe is seen from thy furze : the deer lifts his  
 “ branchy head; for he sees, at times, the hounds, on  
 “ the half-covered heath.\* Slow, on the vale, are the  
 “ steps of the maids; the white-armed daughters of

---

\* A botanist will be disposed to question Mr Macpherson’s introduction of *furze* and *heath*, though they are common in Calde-

- “ Thy dun roe,  
 “ Thy branchy red deer, is amidst the groves ;  
 “ Beholding, upon the mountain,  
 “ The hound pursuing, rapid.\* 330  
 “ Slow on the plain  
 “ Are the steps of the maidens ;  
 “ The white-handed maidens of the strings, (harps,)  
 “ With the bended bow, in the field,  
 “ Lifting their mild, blue, eyes, 335  
 “ From their yellow locks, to the mountain of the  
     brave.  
 “ The steps of Larthon are not on the mountain,
- 

## TRANSLATION.

- “ the bow: they lift their blue eyes to the hill, from  
 “ amidst their wandering locks. Not there is the stride  
 “ of Larthon,
- 

nia. Ossian has no allusion to these plants, or to the favourite  
 idea of “ half-covering.”

“ *Ceann Inis nan geug uaine.*

“ *'Ta e togail dubh dharrach air tonn,*

“ *Ann camus Chluba nam iomadh stuagh;* 340

“ *An dubh dharrach a bhucain e o Lumoin,*

“ *Gu siubhal ar aghaidh a chuain.*

“ *Thionnda oigh an suilean tla,*

“ *O 'u righ, mun tuiteadh e sios.\**

“ *N' im facadh leo riamh an long,* 345

“ *Cear-mharcach,† a chuain mhoir.*

MR MACPHERSON'S

“ chief of Inishuna. He mounts the wave, on his own  
 “ dark oak, in Cluba's ridgy bay; the oak, which he cut  
 “ from Lumon, to bound along the sea. The maids turn

\* The liberties taken by Mr Macpherson, in translating, seem to accumulate rapidly as he proceeds. He confounds entirely the sense of verses 333 and 334, where the maidens are distinguished by their skill on the harp, “ *nan teud,*” and also by their expertness in the bow, “ *'s am bogha crom.*” The beautiful epithet, “ *leadan bhar bhuidh,*” which, indeed, it is difficult to translate with full effect, is miserably lost, in his “ wandering locks.” His



- “ The chief of the island of green branches, (*Inis-  
uaine*;)
- “ He is raising the black oak on the waves,  
 “ In the bay of Cluba of many billows;           340  
 “ The black oak, that he felled on Lumon,  
 “ To sail (travel) on the face of the ocean.  
 “ The maidens turn aside their mild eyes,  
 “ From the king, lest he should fall:\*
- “ *For* never had they beheld a ship           345  
 “ Obliquely † riding on the mighty deep.

## TRANSLATION.

- “ their eyes away, lest the king should be lowly laid; \*  
 “ for never had they seen a ship, dark † rider of the  
 “ wave!

“ stride,” instead of “ steps,” is wretched. From verse 340 to 344, there is much tameness and loss of imagery.

† It appears, as was observed on verse 102, that Mr Macpherson seems not to have understood the epithet *cearr*:—on that occasion, he declines translating it; on the present, he translates it falsely. It here expresses, with fine effect, the appearance of a vessel at sea, inclining to leeward, under a side-wind.

- “ *Ghlaodh anois an rìgh a ghaoth,*  
 “ *Measg\* ceo na marra glais,*  
 “ *Dh eirich Inisfaile gu gorm,*  
 “ *Thuit gu dian oiche nam fras.* 350  
 “ *Bhuail eagal clann Bholga gu luath,*  
 “ *Ghlan neoil o Thonn-theine nan stuagh,*  
  
 “ *Ann camus Ghulbainn dh’ aitich an long,*  
 “ *Far am freagradh coille do thonn.*  
 “ *Bu chopach an sin an sruth,* 355  
 “ *O charraig Dubh-umha nan cós,*  
 “ *’S ann dealradh tannais nach beo,*  
 “ *Le ’n cruth chaochladheach fein.*

## MR MACPHERSON’S

- “ Now he dares to call the winds, and to mix \* with  
 “ the mist of the ocean. Blue Inisfail rose, in smoke,  
 “ but dark-skirted night came down. The sons of Bolga  
 “ feared. The fiery-haired Tonthena rose. Gulbin’s

\* Perhaps there occurs not, in all this Book, a more glaring instance of misconception of the original, and of consequent mistranslation, than this. Mr Macpherson mistakes “ *measg,*”

- " The king now invoked the wind.  
 " Amidst\* the mists of gray ocean,  
 " Inisfail arose, blue.  
 " Swift descended the showery night. 350  
 " Fear suddenly seized the sons of the Bolgi.  
 " The clouds cleared off from Ton-thena of the  
     waves.  
 " In the bay of Gulbin moored the ship,  
 " Where woods re-echoed the waves.  
 " Deep resounded there the strand, 355  
 " From the rock of cavernous Du-thuma;  
 " Where gleam the ghosts of the dead,  
 " In their own changeful forms.
- 

## TRANSLATION.

- " bay received the ship, in the bosom of its echoing  
 " woods. There issued a stream from Duthuma's horrid  
 " cave; where spirits gleamed, at times, with their half-  
 " finished forms.
- 

"among," a preposition, for the kindred verb "to mix." The rest of this passage exhibits striking instances of mistranslation.

- “ *Thanig aistìn gu Learthomn nan long,*  
 “ *Seachd samhlaidh do ’n linn nach beo.* 360  
 “ *Chualas an guth bristeadh trom ;\**  
 “ *Chunncas an siol ann ceo ;*  
 “ *Chunncas siol Atha nan colg,*  
 “ *’S ann clann, cinn-uidhe nam Bolg.*  
 “ *Thaom iad am feachda fein,* 365  
 “ *Mar cheathuch a tearnadh o ’n bheinn,*  
 “ *’Nuair a shuibhlàs e glas, fu osnadh,†*  
 “ *Air Atha nan ioma dos.*  
 “ *Thog Learthon tallu shamhla,*  
 “ *Re caoin fhonn clarsaich nan teud.* 370  
 “ *Dh aom eilde Eirin o cheumna,*

## MR MACPHERSON’S

“ Dreams descended on Larthon ; he saw seven spirits of  
 “ his fathers. He heard their half-formed words, and  
 “ dimly beheld the times to come. He beheld the kings  
 “ of Atha, the sons of future days. They led their

\* *Trom*, literally, *heavy*.

† Mr Laing laughs at the use of the term *autumn*, in poems of the period of Ossian. He will see, that the term, in this instance,

- “ A dream came to Larthon of ships,  
 “ Seven apparitions of the race of the dead. 360  
 “ Their voice was heard, bursting, solemn; \*  
 “ Their offspring was seen in mist ;  
 “ There was seen the race of warlike Atha,  
 “ And their children, leaders of the Bolgi.  
 “ They poured their hosts, 365  
 “ Like mist descending from the mountain,  
 “ When it passes along, gray, beneath the breeze, †  
 “ On Atha of many groves.  
 “ Larthon built the palace of apparitions,  
 “ To the soft melody of the stringed harp. 370  
 “ The roes of Erin yielded (fled) before his steps ;

## TRANSLATION.

- “ hosts, along the field, like ridges of mist, which winds  
 “ pour, in autumn,\* over Atha of the groves.  
 “ Larthon raised the hall of Samla, to the music of  
 “ the harp. He went forth to the roes of Erin,

at least, is not Ossian's, but Mr James Macpherson's, of the eighteenth century.

“ *Aig aisrigh ghlas nan sruth.*

“ *Ni 'n dichuimhn' dha Lumoin uaine,*

“ *Na Flathal gheal-lamhach nam buadh,\**

“ *'Si coimhead air marcach nan tonn,*

375

“ *O thulaich nan eilde ruadh.*

“ *Lumoin nan sruth!*

“ *Tha thu dealradh air m' anam fein.*” †

MR MACPHERSON'S

“ to their wonted streams. Nor did he forget green-headed

“ Lumon. He often bounded over his seas, to where white-

\* *Nam buadh* signifies, literally, “ *of victories,*” and may be translated, “ *excellent, matchless.*” Flathal was the wife of Larthon, and watched the return of his ship. Mr Macpherson evidently misunderstands this passage, when he interpolates, “ he often bounded over his seas.” In the original, Larthon is not said to *revisit* Flathal, but only to *remember* her.

† Besides the elegancies which have been taken notice of, as lost in Mr Macpherson's translation, and which must, in some measure, be lost in every translation, there is one which, though it has the finest effect in the original, cannot possibly be recognised by the English reader. It is this;—The whole of Fonnar's Song, from verse 303 to verse 378, is given in the Gaelic, in the form of an ode, in lyric measure, of the most harmonious structure, and, probably, adapted to the harp. This, it may be permitted to ob-

“ On the gray hills of *many* streams.  
 “ Nor did he forget verdant Lumon,  
 “ Or Flathal, white-handed *dame* of excellence,\*  
 “ Whilst she watches the riding of the waves, 375  
 “ From the eminence of tawny roes.  
     “ Lumon of streams!  
 “ Thou brightenest upon my soul.” †

---

## TRANSLATION.

“ handed Flathal\* looked from the hill of roes. Lumon of  
 “ the foamy streams! thou risest on Fonnar’s soul.” †

---

serve, is a refinement of verse which was unknown to the heroic poets of Greece and Rome, whose measure, whatever be the subject, proceeds uniformly in the same unvaried numbers. If, in the whole compass of the heroic poetry of the ancients, there be an occasion, on which we should expect a variation of measure, similar to that of this Ossianic ode, it is in the *Odyssey* of Homer, (lib. xii. v. 184.) where the song of the Syrens is introduced; and where we feel some sort of disappointment, in not meeting with a more ample specimen of that bewitching melody. This very singular elegance of poetry is exhibited in the original of the passage before us; but who will say, that it is to be attributed to Mr Macpherson, who has lost it so completely in his own translation?

*Mhosguil gath solluis o 'n ear :*  
*Dh' eirich ard chinn cheathaich nam beann : 380*  
*Chuncas air cladach nan gleannan,*  
*An crom chaochan glas-shruthach fein : \**  
*Chualas sgiath Chathmhoir nan colg :*  
*Mhosguil siol Eirin nam Bolg,*  
*Mar mhuir dhomhail, 'n uair a ghluaiseas gu geur 385*  
*Fuaim ataidh air aghaidh nan speur,*  
*Tuomadh tuinn, † o thaobh gn taobh,*  
*Aig aomadh an glas-chinn baogh,*  
*Gan eolas air suibhal a chuain. ‡*

## MR MACPHERSON'S

Morning pours from the east. The misty heads of the mountains rise. Valleys shew, on every side, the gray winding of their streams.\* His host heard the shield of Cathmor. At once, they rose around, like a

\* The translator is sensible, that he has not been able to do justice to this beautiful description of the morning, the favourite theme of poets. It can be duly felt and admired by those only who have had an opportunity of observing these appearances in a mountainous country.



A ray of light awoke in the east :  
 The lofty heads of the mountains rose in mist: 380  
 There was seen, in the bottom of *every* valley,  
 Its own winding, blue-flowing stream : \*  
 There was heard the shield of warlike Cathmor :  
 The race of Bolgic Erin was roused,  
 Like the turgid sea, when fiercely advances 385  
 The sound of swelling *winds*, on the face of the sky;  
 Tumbling † the waves from side to side,  
 As they incline their gray, troubled, heads,  
 In ignorance of the course of the ocean. ‡

## TRANSLATION.

crowded sea, when first it feels the wings of the wind.  
 The waves know not whither to roll; they lift their  
 troubled heads. ‡

---

† Perhaps better "*taomidh tuinn*,"—"billows tumble, inclining."

‡ This simile,—in which the host of Cathmor, awakening from sleep, and advancing in undetermined movements, at the first sound of his shield, is compared to the undecided motions of the billows, when the sea is first assailed by the winds,—though ex-

*Trom is mall gu Lon nan sruth,* 390  
*Ghluais Suilmhala nan rosg tla;*  
*Ghluais; is thionnda n' oigh le bron,*  
*A gorm shuil fuidh shilleadh bla.*  
*'N uair a thanig i gu carraig chruaidh*  
*Dubh-chroma, air gleannan ann Lon,\** 395  
*Sheall i, o bhristeadh a ceil,*  
*Ajr righ Atha, dh' aom i sios.*  
*“ Buail teud, a mhic Alpin nam fonn,*

---

MR MACPHERSON'S

Sad and slow retired Suilmalla to Lona of the streams. She went, and often turned; her blue eyes rolled in tears. But, when she came to the rock, that darkly co-

---

tremely beautiful and appropriate, is of singular difficulty in translating. Mr Macpherson has given the general idea very slightly, but justly. The present translation is literal.

Mr Laing has remarked, that the expression here used by Mr Macpherson, “the wings of the wind,” is borrowed from Buchanan's Psalms. It has been shewn already, that it is much more ancient than Buchanan. It will appear now, that, in this instance at least, Ossian has nothing to do with it.

\* Perhaps better “*an Loin*.”

Sad and slow, to streamy Lona, 390  
Retired Suilvala, of the mild eye ;  
She retired ; but the maiden returned in sorrow,  
Her blue eye *bathed* in warm tears.  
When she arrived at the rugged rock  
Of Du-chroma, in the vale of Lona, 395  
She looked, in the distraction of her mind,  
On the king of Atha, and sunk down.  
“ Strike the string, son of melodious Alpin.

---

## TRANSLATION.

vered Lona's vale, she looked, from her bursting soul, on  
the king, and sunk at once behind.

“ Son of Alpin, strike the string.

“ *Am bheil solas ann clarsaich nan nial?\** ”

“ *Tuom air Ossein; agns ossun gn trom,* 400

“ *Ta anam a snamh ann ceo.* ”

“ *Chualas thu, bhaird, a ’m oiche;*

“ *Ach siubhladh fonn eatrom uam fein; †*

“ *’S aiteas caoin thuireadh do dh’ Ossein, †*

“ *Am bliadhna ciar na h’ aoise.* 405

#### MR MACPHERSON’S

“ Is there aught of joy in the harp? \* pour it, then, on  
“ the soul of Ossian; it is folded in mist.

\* Mr Macpherson translates this of “ the harp ” in general ; but the poet is here addressing a deceased bard, and requests him to solace him in his solitary sadness, with his *aerial harp*, which, according to the well-known mythology of the Caledonians, was imagined to be heard, from time to time, in the passing breeze. It is here properly called “ the harp of the clouds.”

† Mr Macpherson’s translation of this verse is probably intended to be very fine; and is, perhaps, very fine; but the finery is not Ossian’s.

“ Is there delight in the harp of the clouds?\*

“ Pour it on Ossian, whilst his sigh is heavy; 400

“ His soul swims in mist.

“ I have heard thee, O bard, in my night, (blind-  
ness;)

“ But let light airs depart from me.†

“ Mild sadness (sorrow) is the delight of Ossian,‡

“ In *his* gray years of age. 405

#### TRANSLATION.

“ I hear thee, O bard, in my night. But cease the  
“ lightly-trembling sound.† The joy of grief belongs  
“ to Ossian,‡ amidst his dark-brown years.

‡ “ The joy of grief” is one of those expressions, on which Mr Laing alludverts, as too refined for the period of Ossian. The learned gentleman is right; and he will be pleased to find, that it is not Ossian’s, but Mr James Macpherson’s. Indeed, a very slight analysis will be sufficient to shew, that this noted expression, “ the joy of grief,” borders, very nearly, upon the confines of nonsense. Might we not as well say, “ the whiteness of blackness;” “ the softness of hardness;” or, with an ingenious gentleman, who, speaking of the ebbing sea, observed, “ that the tide was highly low?”

- “ *A dhreuthan uaine, thulaich nan taibhse*  
 “ *A thaomas do cheann air gaoith oiche,*  
 “ *Ni bheil t’ fhathrom am chluais fein ;*  
 “ *Na faiteal tannais ann do gheug ghlais.*  
 “ *’Slionmhor ceumna nam marbh bu treun,* 410  
 “ *Air osnaibh dubh aisrigh nan sian,*  
 “ *N’ uair a ghluaseas a ghealach o’n ear,*  
 “ *Mar ghlas-sgiath, dubh-shiubhal nan speur.*  
     “ *Ullin, a Charril, a Raono !*  
 “ *Guth aimsir a dh’ aom o shean,* 415  
 “ *Chuinneam sibh ann dorchadas Shelma,*  
 “ *Agus mosgluibhse anam nan dan.*  
 “ *Ni ’n chuinneam sibh a shiol nam fonn !*  
 “ *Cia ’n talla do neoil am bheil ’ur suain ?*  
 “ *Na ’n tribhuail sibh clarsach nach trom,* 420
- 

## MR MACPHERSON’S

“ Green thorn of the hill of ghosts, that shakest thy  
 “ head in nightly winds ! I hear no sound in thee. Is  
 “ there no spirit’s windy skirt now rustling in thy leaves ?  
 “ Often are the steps of the dead in the dark-eddying  
 “ blasts, when the moon, a dun shield from the east, is  
 “ rolled along the sky.

“ Green thorn of the eminence of ghosts,  
 “ That bendest thy head in the wind of night,  
 “ Thy rustling is not in my ear ;  
 “ No music of ghosts in thy green branches.  
 “ Frequent are the steps of the valiant dead, 410  
 “ On the breezes of the dusky ascent of storms,  
 “ When the moon advances from the east,  
 “ Like a gray shield, darkly traversing the sky.  
 “ Ullin, and Carril, and Ryno !  
 “ Voices of the time that has passed of old, 415  
 “ Let me hear you in the darkness of Selma,  
 “ And awaken the soul of song.  
 “ I hear you not, ye race of melody !  
 “ In what recess of the clouds is your slumber ?  
 “ Do ye touch (strike) the airy harp, 420

---

## TRANSLATION.

“ Ullin, Carril, and Ryno, voices of the days of old !  
 “ let me hear you, while yet it is dark, to please and  
 “ awake my soul. I hear you not, ye sons of song : in  
 “ what hall of the clouds is your rest ? Do ye touch the  
 “ shadowy harp,

“ *Ann trusgan ceo-maidne, is gruaim;*

“ *Far an eirich, gu fuaimar, a ghrian,\**

“ *O stuaigh nan ceann glas?*

---

MR MACPHERSON'S

“ robed with morning mist, where the rustling sun\* ”

---

\* It is still a notion, amongst the vulgar, in the Highlands of Scotland, that the sun, as he rises, and passes along in the firmament, makes a rustling noise, which may be heard. It may not be uninteresting to those, who study the history of the human mind, which is often developed in popular superstitions, to trace similar notions in another people, placed in nearly the same state



“ In the gloomy skirts of morning’s mist,  
“ Where rises; resounding, the sun,\*  
“ From the green-headed waves *of the east?*”

---

## TRANSLATION.

“ comes forth from its green-headed waves ?”

---

of society with the Caledonians. Tacitus, (*De Mor. Germ.* c. 45.) speaking of the Suiones, (the Swedes,) says, “ that they believe, “ that the sound of the emerging sun is heard; and that the forms “ of the gods, and the rays of their heads, are seen.” Does Tacitus, in the latter clause of this sentence, allude to the phenomenon of the *Aurora Borealis*, so conspicuous in those regions?



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APPENDIX.

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# APPENDIX,

No. I.

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AN

## ENQUIRY

INTO THE EXISTENCE OF THE

DRUIDICAL ORDER IN SCOTLAND.

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THE singular fatality, by which the Celts have lost their once widely-extended influence in western Europe, furnishes a very striking circumstance, even amidst the multiplied vicissitudes which occur in the history of nations. That they occupied, at one period, the whole territory, extending from the Straits of Gibraltar to the northern extremity of Scotland, is generally allowed. In the times previous to Cæsar's invasion of Britain, they were, by the testimony of Tacitus, still

more powerful than at that period. The Celtic Gauls extended their incursions into Germany, as far as Bohemia, to which one of their tribes gave its name.\*

The impression of national character and manners is not soon, or easily, effaced. Much Celtic blood, more or less contaminated, runs, at this day, in the veins of every inhabitant of western Europe; and much of the influence of Celtic character may still be traced. How the Gothic rage, of undervaluing every thing that is Celtic, has become, of late, so fashionable, it is not easy to say; but, in a philosophical point of view, it will probably be allowed, that some account of the few remaining traces of the institutions of that once powerful people, is a desideratum, in literature,

\* Tac. de Mor. Germ. c. 28.

The numerous settlements of the Celts, on the eastern side of the Rhine, as Casaubon well observes, (*Animadversiones in lib. iv. Strabonis*,) may be traced in the names of cities and places which end in *dunum*, "a Celtic word," says he, "which signifies *an eminence*." He adds, "that all places, so called, are actually situated on an *eminence*. *Dun*, in Gaelic, has still this signification."

which it were well worthy of our most learned antiquarians to supply.

Of these, one of the most singular and important is that of Druidism, which is attributed, universally, by the Greek and Roman writers, to the nations of Celtic stock. "As the Persians," says Diogenes Laertius, "have their Magi, and the Indians their Gymnosophists, the Celts have their Druids and their Semnothei."\* The religion of the Druids extended over all Transalpine Gaul; † and, as we shall see afterwards, prevailed even on the Italian side of the Alps. From an expression of Pliny, it would appear, that it extended also to Spain and Portugal.‡

With regard to the existence of the Druidical

\* Diog. Laert. in Proemio.

† See Ausonius Carm. 10.—Flavius Vopiscus in Numeriano, informs us, that the Emperor Diocletian, whilst yet a subaltern in the army, lodged with a Druidess in Tungria, (now Brabant,) who predicted to him, that he should be, one day, emperor; a prediction on which he uniformly relied, till it was accomplished.

‡ "Celticos, (a people of Spain,) a Celtiberis, ex Lusitania advenisse manifestum est, SACRIS, lingua, oppidorum vocabulis."

Plin. Hist. Nat. lib. iii. c. 3.

order in Britain, all authors agree. Cæsar, whose account of this hierarchy is unquestionably the most authentic, as well as the most liberal, informs us, that their institutions were first invented in Britain;\* and that the youth, who wished to be instructed in them, resorted thither, from the other parts of Celtic Europe. Pliny, at a still later period, informs us, “that the magical arts of the  
“ Druids were cultivated in Britain with so much  
“ attention, that this island should seem to have  
“ first communicated those arts to the Persians,”  
who so much excelled in them.†

But it must be remembered, that, at the period of which we speak, Caledonia, also, was inhabited by Celts. Indeed, it seems to be certain, that the Caledonians, especially those who occupied the western part of the island, were of the very same

\* “*Ibi disciplina reperta.*”—Bell. Gall. lib. vi.

† “*Britannia hodie eam (scilicet Druidarum magicam artem)*  
“*attonite celebrat, tantis ceremoniis, ut dedisse Persis videri possit.*”

The Oriental origin of Druidism, as well as of many other important particulars in the manners of the Celts, will receive strong confirmation from the proposed work of the ingenious Mr Gunn, who has already traced so successfully the history of the Caledonian harp.



race with their southern neighbours, who, according to the opinion of Bæda, already cited, emigrating originally from Gaul, by the nearest passage, (an expedition suited to the imperfect navigation of the times,) and, travelling northwards, arrived, at length, in Caledonia. This progress of population has, we know, taken place universally, in the old world. From the account given by Cæsar, of the navigation of the Veneti of Brittany, and of their early intercourse with this island, it is rendered highly probable, that Britain received its first inhabitants from that quarter: and this also is the opinion of Tacitus, who enjoyed such a favourable opportunity of being well informed on this subject. After noticing the various opinions which had been advanced, concerning the original population of this island, he adds, “ To one, who forms  
“ his opinion upon the whole, it appears credible,  
“ that the Gauls occupied this territory, which lay  
“ in their vicinity. In the *superstitions* of the one,  
“ you may trace the *sacred rites* of the other. Their  
“ language is not very different.” \*

\* “ *In universum tamen æstimanti,*” §c.—Agric. c. 11.

Such was the matured opinion of this acute historian; nor let it be objected, that South Britain only is intended in this passage. Tacitus, though he sometimes distinguishes those who inhabited to the north of the walls, by the name of Caledonians, just as frequently applies to them that of Britons.\*

If, then, Caledonia was inhabited by Celts, who, passing northwards from Gaul, by South Britain, carried along with them, as we know they did, the language of Gaul, by what mode of reasoning can it be argued, that they left behind them the religious institutions of their ancestors? By every argument, founded on analogy, we are led to conclude, that, with the language, and other habits of their original soil, they also carried with them the Celtic institution of Druidism.

That Druidism prevailed in Ireland, there is abundant proof. In a very ancient work, the *Trias Thaumaturga* of Colgan, we have a hymn, addressed to St Patrick, in the Irish language, by Fia-

\* Agric. c. 25. 26. 27. and 29. where the soldiers of Galgacus are termed Britons.

chus, who is denominated, “ *Episcopus Sleptensis* :” it begins thus :

“ *Genair Padruic in Nemthur.*”

In this hymn, there occurs frequent mention of the Druids. I shall select one, in verses 41 and 42 :

“ *A Dhruidhe, ar Laoghaire,*  
“ *Tichte Phadruic ni cheillis.*”

That is:—“ Thou, O Druid, didst not conceal from Leogaire, the arrival of Patrick.”

In a well-written Itinerary of Ireland, published in Dublin, in 1787, by Robert Wilson, I find the following passage :—

“ In 1784, there was found a curious tombstone, on Callan mountains, (in Irish, *Altoir na greine*, or ‘ the altar of the sun,’) about eight miles west of the town of Ennis, with the following inscription, in Irish :—‘ Beneath this flag is interred Connan, the turbulent and swift-footed.’ The stone is of granite, between seven and eight feet long, and from three to four in breadth. In an historical tale,” says Mr Wilson, “ written,

“ as is supposed, by Ossin, in 296, the author thus  
 “ apostrophises:—‘ But the intrepid hero, Conan,  
 “ was not at this bloody battle; for, going to the  
 “ adoration of the sun, on the preceding May,\* he  
 “ was cut off by the Leinster troops, and his body  
 “ lies interred on the north-west side of the dreary  
 “ mountain of Callan.’ This stone,” adds the writer  
 of the Itinerary, “ has been long celebrated in  
 “ the county of Clare. On the south side of this  
 “ mountain, is a very large Druidical altar, the  
 “ most regular of the kind now remaining, and of  
 “ the highest antiquity. It stands about half a  
 “ mile distant from the high road leading from  
 “ Ennis to Ibraban, on the right hand.”

The direct proof of the existence of Druidism in Scotland is, it must be acknowledged, of considerable difficulty; arising partly from the nature of the institution itself, and partly from the long period that has elapsed since its abolition.

The Druids, as we are informed by ancient authors, affected secrecy in a high degree. They

\* See, afterwards, of the worship of Belis, or Belenus, the Sun, by the Celts.

retired from the observation of the world, into thick groves and forests,\* and studiously concealed their mysteries from the vulgar. “ They taught obscurely,” says Laertius, “ and in short sentences, that the gods are to be worshipped; and that no evil should be done.”

Seventeen centuries, too, have elapsed, since this order has been abolished. In England, as we learn from Tacitus, it had been abolished at a still earlier period. Indeed, the Druids appear to have rendered themselves universally obnoxious to the ruling powers, both at home and abroad, by their ambition, and by their cruel rites. Augustus, on account of their horrid sacrifices, forbade the exercise of the Druidical rites to the citizens of Rome; Tiberius banished the professors of this institution from the city; and Claudius endeavoured, as far as in him lay, to extirpate Druidism, even in Gaul itself.†

We need not wonder, then, that so few monu-

\* See Lucan's *Pharsalia*, lib. i.

† Pliny *Hist. Nat.* lib. xxx. c. 1.; Suetonius in *Augusto*, *Tiberio*, et *Claudio*; and *Aurelius Victor*.

ments of this ancient hierarchy have remained to these times; or that, in the slight notices which ancient historians afford us of the state of Caledonia, at this early period, we should have little information concerning our Druids. Mr Laing observes, “that the fact appears to be certain, that “there never was a Druid in Scotland; otherwise,” says he, “Tacitus, who describes the destruction of their order in England, must have “remarked their influence, or existence, in the “Caledonian war.”\*

But I may be permitted to remark, that, if this argument be good for any thing, it might also serve to prove, that there never were any Druids in England. In the very minute and interesting detail, which is given by Tacitus, of the conduct of the war, under Ostorius, and of the final defeat and captivity of Caractacus,† we meet not with the slightest allusion to “the influence, or existence, of the Druids” in England. It appears, indeed, that, as far as regards the testimony of Ta-

\* Page 391.

† Tac. Annal. lib xii. c. 33.

citns, had *the fourteenth* book of his Annals, in which the history of the extermination of the Druids in England is narrated, shared the same fate with some other portions of his valuable writings, we should have had no evidence, from him, that the order had ever existed there. Nor does it appear, that, even in this instance, Tacitus would have made mention of the fate of the Druids, had it been merely a domestic transaction, as it is represented to have been in Scotland. But the fortunes of the Druids were, on this occasion, intimately connected with Roman history. Publius Suetonius, the Roman governor, had resolved on an expedition against Anglesea, then a receptacle of deserters. Anglesea was the sacred retreat, and chief residence, of the Druids. Though exempted from the services of war, they stand forward in defence of their sanctuary, and are destroyed.

Thus, the mention of the Druidical Order occurs necessarily, *on this occasion*, in the historian; but it was inconsistent with the classical correctness of the biographer of Agricola to violate the unity of his subject, by any direct notices of a

class of men, whose history and character were altogether foreign to it. Nor can it be fairly inferred, that, even in the life of Agricola, no *allusion* is made to “the influence and existence” of the Druids in Caledonia. We read, concerning the preparations which were made against the Romans, before the battle of the Grampians, “that the Britons relaxed in no respect in their exertions, in arming the youth, and in confirming the combination of the states, by public meetings, and *by sacrifices.*”\* But what *sacrifices*, it may be asked, were ever practised, or heard of, amongst the Celts, except the horrid immolations of the Druids?

But, though no direct evidence is furnished, by the Greek and Roman writers, of the existence of the Druids in Caledonia, it might be expected, that, from the permanent state of society in the Highlands, during so many ages, some internal proofs, at least, might be found in the traditions, and popular superstitions, of the country.

\* Tac. Agric. c. 27.



1. As to tradition, it is uniform and express; “ that the family of Fingal, having been appointed, according to the custom of the Celts,\* on some emergency, to the temporary sovereignty, found themselves so firmly established in their power, that they refused to resign it to the Druids, as had been done on former occasions; that the Druids endeavoured to reduce the Fingallians by force, calling in the Scandinavians (the people of Lochlin) to their aid; but that they were overcome, and finally exterminated.” †

There is reason to believe, at the same time, that, notwithstanding the extinction of the Druids, as an order, several individuals of them continued to exist, under the patronage of princes and great men, for several centuries after the period of Fingal. In Adomnan’s Life of St Columba, we read of the *Mocidruidi*, or “ sons of the Druids,” in Scotland. In the same work, we are informed,

\* See Cæsar de Bell. Gall. lib. i. c. 16.

† See the poems entitled, “ Dargo, the Son of the Druid of Bel,” and “ Conn, the Son of Dargo,” in Dr Smith’s *Seandana*, p. 223 and 245.

“ that, at the castle of the king, the saint was  
 “ interrupted, in the discharge of his religious  
 “ offices, by certain Magi ;” by whom, according  
 to the application of the term by Pliny, in the  
 passage cited above, we are undoubtedly to under-  
 stand the Druids.\*

It appears, that it is this same circumstance,  
 which is related in an extract from an ancient  
 Gaelic manuscript of the twelfth or thirteenth  
 century, of which a fac-simile is given in the Ap-  
 pendix to the Committee’s Report, and which is  
 thus translated by Dr Donald Smith :—

“ After this, St Columba went, upon a time, to  
 “ the king of the Picts ; namely, Bruidhi, son of  
 “ Milchu, and the gate of the castle was shut  
 “ against him ; but the iron locks of the town  
 “ opened instantly, through the prayers of Columb  
 “ Cille. Then came the son of the king, to wit,

\* I cite the entire passage from Adomnan :—“ *Juxta Brudæi  
 “ munitionem, dum ipse sanctus, cum paucis fratribus dei laudes, ex  
 “ more celebrarent, quidam Magi ad eos propius accedentes, in quan-  
 “ tum poterant, prohibere conabantur ; ne de ore ipsorum divinæ lau-  
 “ dis sonus inter Gentiles audiretur populos.*

Vita S. Columbæ, lib. i. c. 38.

“ Maelchu, and his Druid, to argue keenly against  
“ Columb Cille, in support of Paganism.”\*

2. In the superstitions still prevalent in the Highlands of Scotland, we meet with very distinct traces of the character and fate of the Druids. Toland, in his Essay on the Druids, first remarked, that, in the popular belief concerning the Fairies, or, as they are called by the Highlanders, the *Daoine shith*, or “ Men of Peace,” we have the evident reliques of the history of the Druidical Order. This elegant mythology is still to be found entire in the Highlands. † And it may be observed, that, in the habitations assigned to these imaginary beings, we may trace the sacred recesses of the Druids; and, in the deceptive powers ascribed to them, their magical arts. In the peevish jealousy and envy, which they are sup-

\* App. Report, p. 311.

† Of this mythology, with the argument founded on it, I have had occasion to give an account, at some length, in a small tract, entitled, “ Sketches of Picturesque Scenery in Perthshire, with “ Notices concerning the Natural History and Popular Superstitions of the Country.”

posed to entertain against mankind, we may recognise the feelings of a once powerful order, who found themselves at length reduced to seek shelter in caves, and in forests; deprived of the high influence, which they had enjoyed; and stripped, no doubt, of the wealth which they had accumulated, through a series of ages.

## DRUIDICAL CIRCLES.

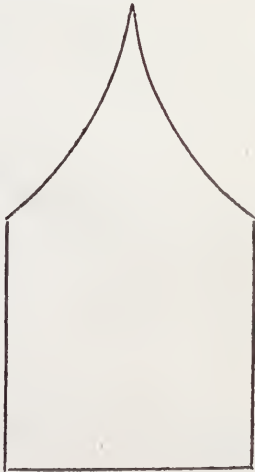
ANOTHER circumstance, which seems to prove incontestibly the existence of the Druids in Scotland, is the frequency of the *circles of stones*, the places of Druidical worship, especially in the northern and western counties. These are called *clachans*, “the stones,” by the Highlanders; the term most commonly used by them, at this day, for a place of worship. These circles abound in the western isles, particularly in the Harris, which is said to have been, like Anglesea, one of the sacred retreats of the Druids.\* Toland mentions several of these circles; and Mr Pennant describes one of them very particularly. †

Within a few hundred yards of the place where I now sit, there is a *clachan*, or circle of stones,

\* See Henry's History of Britain, book i. chap. 2. § 1.

† Tour, vol. ii. p. 38.

still called the "Clachan of Aberfoyle." It is situated on a rising ground, facing the south; and preserved inviolate from the plough. It is twenty feet in diameter precisely, and consists of fourteen oblong stones, of a rude shape, and from four to five feet in length; there is placed, in the centre, one stone, of a more regular figure, and evidently assisted by the hand of art. It is four feet six inches in height, three feet six inches in breadth, and sixteen inches in thickness; it terminates, at the top, in a sharp spherical angle, and is nearly of the following figure :



All these stones appear formerly to have stood on one end, but have now fallen down. There is a wider interval, or opening, between the stones of the circumference, facing the meridian.

THE  
FESTIVALS

OF THE  
BELTEIN AND SAMHIN.

THE Highlanders still retain distinct traces of the two grand festivals of the Druids; the *Beltein*, or Fire of Belis, the Sun, or Apollo of the Celts; and the *Samh-thein*, or *Samhin*, the Fire of Peace, kindled on Hallow-eve. The *Beltein* was the festival of the commencement of the Druidical year, the first of May; and is, at this day, the term used to denote that season. According to tradition, the people assembled, on that day, on the summits of the highest mountains, and kindled large fires in honour of *Belis*, or the Sun, the beneficent parent of the joys of summer. The *Samhin*, again, or Fire of Peace, was kindled on the evening preceding the first day of winter, when,



according to tradition, the people assembled on the tops of hills and eminences, to have justice administered to them by the Druids, and to receive a portion of the sacred fire, for the use of their habitations, during the ensuing season. This festival is still, in some degree, observed, over a great part of Scotland, by kindling fires on Hallow-eve, on hills and eminences, and by many superstitious rites, evidently borrowed from the Druidical mysteries.\*

I consider, then, this worship of *Belis*, the Apollo of the Celts, which prevailed in Caledonia; and the preservation of his proper appellation, in the name of the festival which was celebrated in honour of him; together with many expressions† and allusions to this name, which still remain, as affording an irrefragable proof of the existence of Druidism in Scotland.

Mr Laing, indeed, treats with scorn, “this etymology of *Bel-tein*, from *Bel*, an Assyrian deity,”

\* See these superstitions beautifully illustrated by Burns, in his poem, entitled, “Hallow-e’en.”

† Thus, *Gabha-bheil*, or “the jeopardy of Bel,” the fiery ordeal, is the term still used to denote *imminent danger*.

says he, ironically, "once worshipped in the High-lands of Scotland."\* But, notwithstanding the decisive tone of the learned gentleman, I must be permitted to observe, on the unquestionable authority of ancient authors, that, whilst *Bel*, or *Belis*, was an Assyrian, he was also a Celtic, divinity, worshipped in the very western extremity of Celtic Europe.

In the account given by Julius Capitolinus, of the siege of Aquileia, in Cisalpine Gaul, we are informed, that "the god *Belenus*, their Apollo, fought in defence of the besieged." In Gruterus, accordingly, we have an account of several altars, found in that city, inscribed "Apollini *Beleno*." †

Nor was *Belenus* the Apollo of Cisalpine Gaul only, but also of the Transalpine. From the poems of Ausonius, we learn, that *Belenus* was the god of the Druids, and worshipped by the Armorici, ‡ the inhabitants of that part of Gaul which

\* Page 434. note.

† See Gherardus Joan. Vossius, de Origine et Progressu Idololatriæ, Tom. i. p. 389, &c.

‡ See Plinii Hist. Nat. lib. iv. c. 31. with the note of Father

extends along the Bay of Biscay, including Britany.\* If we consult our maps, we shall find, that this Assyrian deity had not a much longer journey to make “into the Highlands of Scotland,” than into Armoric Gaul.

That this *Belemus* was also called *Belis*, we learn from Herodian, who, relating the siege of Aquileia, above referred to, tells the same story of the interference of this local divinity, “whom,” says he, “they call *Belis*, and to whom they pay ex-

Harduin, who derives the name from the Celtic *Ar-mor*, that is, “upon the sea.”

\* *Nec reticebo senem*  
*Nomine Phæbicum*  
*Qui Beleni ædituus*  
*Stirpe satus Druidum*  
*Gentis Arëmorice*  
*Burdigali cathedram*  
*Nati opera obtinuit.*

Ausonius, *carm.* 10.

And, again,

*Tu Bajocassis, stirpe Druidarum satus,*  
*Si fama non fallit fidem,*  
*Beleni sacrotum ducis c templo genus.*

*Carm.* 4.

“cessive veneration, holding him to be Apol-  
“lo.”\*

I shall conclude this subject, by taking notice of a very remarkable passage of Plutarch:—“Demetrius,” says he, in his Treatise *De Defectu Oraculorum*, “besides related, that there are many  
“desart islands scattered about Britain, like the  
“Sporades of the Greeks, some of which are  
“named the islands of *Demons*, and others, of  
“*Heroes*; that he, being sent by the emperor,†  
“came into that which was nearest to the desart  
“isles; and having but a few inhabitants, who  
“were *held sacred and inviolable* by the Britons.  
“Upon his arrival,” it is added, “there arose a  
“great disturbance in the air; many prodigies ap-  
“peared; and winds and storms assailed the earth.  
“When this was over, one of the islanders told  
“him, that one of their most eminent persons had  
“just deceased,” &c.

\* Ἐπιχωρῆς θεῶν---Βελιν δὲ καλεῖται τῶν, σεβῶσι δὲ ὑπερφυῶς,  
Ἀπολλωνία εἶναι ἑθελούτες.---*Herodian*, lib. viii. c. 7

† Orig. βασιλεὺς.

From this passage, it would seem, that the following conclusions may be fairly drawn:—

1. “ That the cluster of islands, here spoken of, “ as resembling the Sporades of the Archipelago, “ was the Hebrides.” Anglesea cannot be intended; for it forms no cluster of islands. Neither can the Orkneys be meant; for we are informed, on the unquestionable authority of Tacitus, that they were unknown to the Romans, till towards the close of the first century, when they were discovered, for the first time, by the fleet of Agricola.\* But this voyage of Demetrius, mentioned by Plutarch, must have taken place under the Emperor Claudius, whose expedition against

Eutropius, indeed, asserts, that the islands, which were added to the Roman empire, by Claudius, were the Orkneys; but what is the authority of Eutropius, compared with that of Tacitus? He furnishes us, however, with a very important circumstance, founded, no doubt, on the general impression which was entertained, when he wrote, and probably handed down in history, that the islands, conquered by Claudius, were “ *Ultra Britanniam, in oceano positas,*”—“ situated beyond Britain, in the ocean.” They could not, then, be the Scilly islands; they must have been the Hebrides.

Britain, we know, took place about A. D. 43; for it is certain, that, except Julius Cæsar, Claudius was the only Roman emperor that visited this island, till after the death of Plutarch, who relates the story.

2. “ It would appear, that the emperor (*βασιλευς*) “ had received his original information, concern- “ ing these islands, from some Celtic Britons.” He seems to have been informed, that some of them were called the *islands of Demons*; probably the *Ifreoine*, “ the Cold island of Fingal,” the term used, at this day, by the Highlanders, to denominate hell, or the place of torment; and others, the *islands of Heroes*, undoubtedly the *Flath-innis*, “ the island of the Brave,” the Celtic heaven.

3. “ That the few Britons, who were found in “ one of those is *lands* who were held sacred and in- “ violable by their countrymen, were no other than “ the Druids.” This character, we know, is universally ascribed to them, in ancient history, as well as in tradition. It is even probable, that the island, which Demetrius visited, was Iona, formerly

called, by the Highlanders, *Innis-druineach*, or the “island of the Druids,” and where, to this day, the natives point out *Claodh nan Druidhean*, or the “burying place of the Druids.” Perhaps Iona was their sacred residence in Caledonia, as Anglesea was in England.





APPENDIX,

No. II.

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THE

ORIGIN OF SUPERSTITION,

ILLUSTRATED IN THE

MYTHOLOGY OF THE POEMS OF OSSIAN,

BY

PROFESSOR RICHARDSON!

OF GLASGOW COLLEGE.

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INTRODUCTION.

**M**ANKIND, in the earliest periods of human society, were acquainted with the doctrines of true religion. They believed in the existence, in the power, wisdom, goodness, and superintending providence of one Supreme Being; who, as the

Creator, and the Preserver, of all things, was the object of their religious worship. It also appears, that mankind, in the earliest ages, were in possession of many useful, and even elegant, arts. The proofs of these statements are presented, with convincing evidence, in the Sacred Writings; and in the traditions of those heathen nations, of whose opinions and antiquity we have any good information.

It is no less certain, that, in process of time, and even in a short time, all, or a great part, of this important knowledge was lost: excepting in one family, and afterwards in a very inconsiderable nation, men ceased to believe in one Supreme Being. At the same time also, or rather previously, so far from preserving the advantages arising from useful and elegant arts, a great part of them became not only uncivilized, but utterly rude and savage. Scattered, as their numbers increased, in tribes and families, over the face of the earth, they degenerated into a state of barbarity, little different from those fierce and irrational animals, that inhabited the woods and deserts.

Yet none of the uncivilized, or barbarous, tribes

and nations, of whom we have any certain accounts, were altogether destitute of some religious, or superstitious, opinions. If they knew not the true God, they believed in, and worshipped, a variety of other beings, greatly superior to themselves, of a nature considerably different, and whom, as taking interest in their welfare, they were bound to adore. Yet opinions of this sort, and the consequent observances, did not originate either in revelation, or in the deductions of a well-informed understanding. They were derived solely from the impulses of passion and sensibility, cooperating with those associations of thought which proceed from the influences of a prompt and un-governed imagination.

Here now, we have presented to us, an interesting and important subject of inquiry:—What are those dispositions, those affections, those passions, or those tendencies of sensibility, which, exciting, promoting, or acting along with the combinations of fancy, produced such sentiments, and laid the foundation for a complex and extended system of religious, or superstitious, worship? What are those principles, which have not their object within the

visible sphere of creation; that, as it were, condemn the authority of the senses, treat their notices as imperfect, and, employing the guidance and vigour of imagination, connect visible with invisible beings; and subject mankind to the dominion of agents existing in a different state, and with whom they were hitherto unacquainted? In thus stating the matter, it seems, at first sight, extraordinary, that mere savages, who seem to live for the purposes alone of animal gratification, without much curiosity, and incapable of extensive reasonings, should be influenced by feelings, or sentiments, leading to such important consequences.

Here, however, notwithstanding the apparent difficulty, it will immediately occur, that there are many feelings and passions, in the human mind, such as surprise, fear, astonishment, and admiration, which may induce even the most unimproved of the human race, to conceive the existence of superior and invisible beings. Our inquiry is, therefore, limited to the investigation of those principles, which are not of a fugitive, or transient, nature, but which act with so much uniformity,

so much steadiness, and are of such general, or universal, extension, as to become the foundation of a permanent, complicated, and universal, system. Those, therefore, which seem to me to be the most completely adequate to this effect, and whose operation, in producing it, I proceed to illustrate, are *affection* and *admiration* for friends and heroic leaders, exciting such *sorrow*, at their death, as induces their survivors to believe, that they are not really, or altogether, dead; and to imagine them in such a separate state of existence, as is suited to their powers and virtues.

## PART I.

**M**EN, even in the rudest periods of society, are capable, in some measure, of distinguishing merit, or demerit, in human actions; they are capable of being affected by, or of being grateful for, deeds of kindness; they are capable of entertaining suitable and corresponding sentiments towards amiable and respectable characters; they love, and they admire: but love, friendship, and admiration suppose the existence of those qualities in their object, which are fitted to excite them, else these affections could not themselves exist. So that here, we have two things very intimately and habitually combined:—we have feelings and affections, of a very peculiar kind, towards a particular object; and an intellectual conviction, that certain attributes, or properties, of a corresponding nature, actually exist in it. I observe, therefore, that

fondly attached as men are, in early ages, to their friends and protectors, such persons are not only the frequent subject of their thoughts, and topic of their discourse; but also, that whenever they occur to their attention, or recollection, they are intimately connected with superior and illustrious qualities. The image of the individual, whom they love or esteem, as it arises to their fancy, or to their remembrance, is as inherently endowed with peculiar powers and virtues, as he is invested externally with an appropriate shape and figure. He is not more inseparably connected, in their apprehension, with limbs of a certain proportion, or a complexion of peculiar tints, than with active spirit, and intrepid boldness. They can as little think of him divested of these, as of that particular structure and colour of his external frame, by which his person is known to them. He cannot be conceived, as deprived of his mental, any more than of his bodily, appearance. But, if certain qualities be constantly and habitually combined with any particular object, their union will appear so close, especially to uncultivated minds, as to be accounted inherent. Men have difficulty, and, conse-

quently, they have dislike ; they have hesitation, and even reluctance, in considering them as separated from one another. The habit of always connecting the object and its customary properties, or attributes, occasions pain, in a peculiar manner, if they are suddenly and unexpectedly disunited. This sensation, of consequence, becomes still more acute, in the bosoms of those who are strangers to reflection, than to such as are more accustomed to distinguish and to discriminate. Men, in uncivilized ages, are, therefore, so exceedingly afflicted, by such unexpected separation, as to be willing, in the moment of their distress, to admit any consideration, or yield to any impression, that can lessen their uneasiness, or afford them relief. Suppose now, that a person beloved, or almost revered, by a rude Indian, or Celtic, family, is suddenly deprived of life ; that he has no longer any power of motion, or any principle of worthy and affectionate conduct ; yet friendship and admiration were ever intimately and inherently united with his image, as it arose in their conception ; and these affections, now rendered more animated by the shock they sustain, suppose him possessed



of corresponding qualities. How, therefore, are their feelings, and even the tendencies of their understanding, affected? Will they acquiesce calmly in the decrees of nature? Will their love, or their veneration, decay with instantaneous conviction, and be buried with the deceased? On the contrary, these affections are established, by habit, in the constitution, and will, therefore, continue: they are roused by a heavy stroke, and become excessive; the deceased is before them; their affection for him is heightened with sorrow; they love, they respect, they venerate, the deceased. But what do they venerate? A nonentity?—Suffice it to say, that, by the influence of admiration and affection, there is a predisposition in the mind to think of the dead, as if he still existed. Persons of sensibility have surely felt it. Persons of sensibility, in all periods, have felt it. The Africans, near the Cape of Good Hope, according to the accounts of an enlightened traveller, reproach their friends, when they die, for leaving them. The rude Morlachians, according to the account of even a philosophical traveller, in the first moments of their grief for a departed friend, expos-

tulate with him; and ask what had so offended him, as to make him forsake them? Virgil, too, (for true poets speak the language of nature,) represents Æneas in the affectionate recollection of his father, as expressing a regret, somewhat tinctured with blame, for having left him in the “time of need:”

*Hic me pater optime, FESSUM  
DESERIS.*

In this state of feeling, in this disposition to consider the dead as conscious and capable of thought, imagination, the ready minister of every passion, affords immediate and efficacious relief; she separates the mind from the body, and reserves for it all those thoughts and sentiments which suit the grief of the mourner. The notion, indeed, that a being, in full possession of vigour and activity, and susceptible of the warmest affections, should pass immediately into a state of non-existence, and become nothing, exhibits a view so bleak, so dreary, and so repugnant to every ardent prepossession, that the imagination shudders, and flies to visions more solacing and more enlivening. Was

it more natural for Matilda, grieving for the loss of her husband, to suppose him a nonentity, than to conceive him existing in a disembodied state, and often the witness of her complaint?

Ye woods and wilds, whose melancholy gloom  
 Accords with my soul's sadness, and draws forth  
 The voice of sorrow from my bursting heart,  
 Farewell a while. I will not leave you long;  
 For in your shades I deem some spirit dwells,  
 Who, from the chiding stream, or groaning oak,  
 Still hears, and answers to Matilda's moan.  
 O Douglas, Douglas, if departed ghosts  
 Are e'er permitted to review this world,  
 Within the circle of that wood thou art,  
 And, with the passion of immortals, hear'st  
 My lamentation !

Another circumstance operates, in a powerful manner, to establish a conviction of the separate state of the dead. The Celt, the Scythian, or Indian, grieving for the loss of his friend, falls asleep, and beholds him in his dreams; he converses with him, and enjoys unspeakable pleasure in this ideal intercourse; he awakens; he looks around for him, but sees him not; he calls, but re-

ceives no answer; he hears nothing but the roaring of a stream, or the wind in the lonely forest; he is filled with awe; his heart is shaken; he had laid his friend in the dust, yet he beheld him; his feelings are as if in the presence of an invisible being, of him whom he saw in his vision, of his friend disembodied, but still moved with affection. There is not a more happy example of grief, operating and influencing the imagination, in this manner, than where Achilles, immediately after the death of Patroclus, is represented, in the *Iliad*, as beholding, and as conversing with, his friend in a dream:

Hushed by the murmurs of the rolling deep,  
At length he sinks in the soft arms of sleep.  
When, lo! the shade, before his closing eyes,  
Of sad Patroclus rose, or seemed to rise.  
In the same robe he living wore, he came,  
In stature, voice, and pleasing look, the same.  
Confused he wakes; amazement breaks the bands  
Of golden sleep, and, starting from the sands,  
Pensive he muses, with uplifted hands.  
“ ’Tis true, ’tis certain, man, though dead, retains  
Part of himself; th’ immortal mind remains;

The form subsists, without the body's aid,  
Aërial semblance, and an empty shade !  
This night, my friend, so late in battle lost,  
Stood at my side, a pensive, plaintive, ghost."

*ILIAD*, xxiii.

Thus, then, we have, in the spirits of the dead, a numerous class of invisible, intelligent agents, in whom mankind are deeply and affectionately concerned ; and these are the immediate offspring of the genuine sensibilities and natural associations of the human mind. I proceed to illustrate the process by which such visionary beings are exalted to the enjoyment of a happiness suited to their condition, and not only so, but to great power and authority over the fortunes and affairs of men.

II. Esteem, friendship, and admiration, deprived of their object, occasion sorrow. Though removed even by death, the natural tendency of sorrow is to affect the imagination so, as if the person for whom we grieved were, in some degree, sensible of the change he had undergone. The generality of mankind, in the first moments of

their sorrow for the death of friends, conceive of the dead as of a sufferer. They must, therefore, conceive him sensible; and, if so, they conceive him existing somehow apart from the body. Under this impression, they think, they cannot testify their regard for him in a manner sufficiently strong and affecting. Accordingly, they do every thing in their power to console the dead, and to render his situation agreeable. They wash his wounds, if he has fallen in battle; they close his eyes, and remove every thing offensive from his external appearance; they honour him, and celebrate his obsequies, with solemn pomp and magnificent ceremony:

O more than brother! think each office paid,  
Whate'er can rest a discontented shade.

Here a striking effect ensues. By having performed these operations, the sorrow of surviving friends is relieved. They have discharged a duty; they have gratified affection; they have rendered the offices of friendship to the deceased; they are somewhat satisfied, that he is sensible of what they have done; that he is relieved, by their at-

tention to the body, with which they still suppose him to have some connection; and that he is pleased, and has even some enjoyment, in this testimony of their regard. Having thus bestowed consciousness, and a new state of existence, on the deceased, and being comforted themselves, they transfer the condition of their own minds to their friend, and believe, that he also is comforted. Thus, of consequence, they believe him capable of being rendered happy. In confirmation of all this, let us remember, that, among rude nations, the dead are never supposed to pass into a state of ease, or felicity, till due obsequies are performed to them. No spirits were permitted to cross the Styx till they were inhumed. The Indians of North America entertain similar opinions; and imagine, that certain rites are necessary; before the souls of departed warriors can arrive at their blissful valleys. Upon this principle, also, is founded the practice of those elegiac writers of antiquity, and of those eminent moderns who have imitated them, in lamenting the dead, and in celebrating their virtues. The first part of the elegy is generally employed in rehearsing the

praises of the deceased; in expressing sorrow for his departure; and, in calling upon his friends to honour his memory, and solemnize his obsequies. The second part, containing the apotheosis, is consolatory. The deceased is comforted, and is not only pleased with their attentions, but is capable of enjoying happiness :

*Extinctum nymphæ crudeli funere Daphnim  
Flebant: vos coryli testes, et flumina nymphis;  
Non ulli pastos illis egere diebus  
Frigida, Daphni, boves ad flumina, &c.  
Spargite humum foliis  
Et tumulum facite; et tumulo superaddite carmen, &c.*

Thus, the mourners, having discharged their duties of respect, and having expressed the feelings of affection, are themselves comforted; and, transferring their own comfort to the deceased, they suppose, in the second part, that he is not only relieved, but rendered happy:

*Candidus insuetum miratur limen Olympi,  
Sub pedibusque videt nubes et sidera Daphnis.  
Semper honos, nomensq; tuum laudesq; manebunt, &c.*

Weep no more, woeful shepherds, weep no more,  
For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,



Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor :  
So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,  
And yet anon repairs his drooping head, &c.

III. As we have thus immortalized the dead, and bestowed upon them a certain portion of ease and of happiness, it remains, that we consider in what manner they are to be exalted and rendered powerful. As the sorrow of men, lamenting for the death of dear and respected friends, is abated, and as they suppose them possessed of such amiable or respectable qualities, as tend to confer, and entitle them to, the enjoyment of happiness, and deserve reward, they naturally conceive them to be in a state of supreme felicity. But their notions of felicity are suited to their own dispositions, and the character of the deceased. Men, in early periods, of enterprising minds, and of vigorous bodies, never imagine, that the gallant warrior, so active and intrepid while alive, is to remain, after his death, in mansions of indolence and listless pleasure. They never imagine, that he, who was formerly so zealously interested in the welfare of his nation, and had a bosom glowing with the liveliest affection, should now be unmind-

ful of his friends, of those who lament his death, and revere his memory. As he is removed from among them, as their remembrance of him is embalmed in their esteem, and as they are no longer the witnesses of his weaknesses; his failings, imperfections, and weaknesses, will be forgotten. They dwell on nothing, but on his virtues; they enlarge and increase his powers. But what powers can he now possess? Divested of the body, he is deprived of strength; and this, in rude ages, must be accounted a great calamity. Yet an evil of this kind may be compensated. His nature is no longer gross and corporeal; he is a thin aërial substance; he rises upwards; he sojourns on the top of high mountains, or has a dwelling among the clouds. In those countries, where there are many hills, and many exhalations; where the clouds, and appearances of the atmosphere, are frequently varying, can any thing be more natural than to suppose, that the spirits of the dead are carried about, or reside among them? When a ruler of the Roman state was deified, the eagle, that conveyed, or attended, his spirit from the funeral pile, ascended upwards. The splendid ap-

pearances of the sky, on the summit of Olympus, rendered it a fit place for the synod, or residence, of preternatural beings. As clouds, storms, and tempests, seemed to be driven, as it were, by living agents, the spirits of the dead, having now attributed to them preternatural power, rendered the rain, and even the thunder and lightning, the subjects of their dominion. As winds and exhalations are apparently unsubstantial, bodily organs and strength were held ineffectual, in directing, or in restraining, them. What was the strength even of Ajax against a mist, or the agility of Achilles against a deluge? But, by exalting distinguished warriors to this new supremacy, their surviving admirers placed them in a situation suited to their high character, and rendered them capable, as it were, of protecting and preserving their friends :

*Candidus insuetum miratur limen Olympi:  
Sub pedibusq; videt nubes et sidera Daphnis.  
Semper honos, nomeng; tuum, laudesq; manebunt.  
Ut Baccho Cereriq;, tibi sic vota quotannis  
Agricoli facient.*

Now Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more ;  
Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore,

In thy large recompence; and shall be good  
To all that wander in that perilous flood.

In this manner, there is little difficulty in conceiving how the spirits of the dead may, among even the rudest nations, be immortalized and deified. But the subject seems to receive particular illustration, from the mythology (for a mythology does exist,) in the Poems of Ossian, and which I now proceed particularly to illustrate.

## PART II.

WE can scarcely conceive a rude people living in a state of greater seclusion, than the early inhabitants of the Hebrides, and those islands and coasts of Scotland that extend to the north and west. Bounded, on two sides, by the Atlantic Ocean, and separated from the rest of the world, in every other quarter, by lakes, estuaries, and gloomy forests; by tempestuous seas, and inaccessible mountains; by a barren soil, and forbidding climate, they had little intercourse with the rest of mankind; and no other knowledge, civilization, or improvement, than arose from their own experience and observation. If ever their ancestors enjoyed the advantages and information that belong to an improved condition, these had been long lost and forgotten; so that their manners, customs, and opinions, may be considered as en-

tirely their own. In no region whatever, were the dispositions, passions, and natural associations of human thought, less liable, than among these original Celts, to be restrained, or directed, by any thing foreign or extraneous. Whatever system, therefore, or scheme of opinions, can be discerned among them, must be the result of the unbiassed impulses of the human heart, and of the immediate combinations of an active, but untutored, imagination. It were indeed difficult, if not impossible, in the history of any people, to point out a system of unrevealed, and unphilosophical, religion, so genuine and so natural, so much the effect of sensibility, affection, and imagination, operating, unrestrained by authority, unmodified by example, and untinged with artificial tenets, as in the mythology of the Poems of Ossian. These poems, however, have not been supposed to exhibit, in the manners of the people whom they describe, any religious doctrines, or superstitious observances. It affords, in truth, no slight presumption, or even internal evidence, of the authenticity, at least, of these passages where religious opinions occur, that the editor, or translator himself, not

discerning their real import, conceived, and asserted, that they contained no mythology.\* They make no mention, indeed, of Jupiter, or any deity of the Greeks and Romans; they make no mention of Odin, and scarcely of any Scandinavian divinity, yet they disclose a mythological scheme, certainly not very complicated, nor constructed of many parts, but of which the particulars are very consistent, the arrangements distinct, and the limits sufficiently definite.

I. In perfect consistency with the progress in the preceding theory, those Celtic tribes, whose manners are displayed by their cotemporary poet, felt all the sorrow, for the death and final removal of their friends and warriors, which flows from very high admiration and unrestrained affection. This sorrow, influencing the combinations of a wild and ungoverned fancy, induced them to be-

\* It appears, indeed, somewhat singular, that not only Mr Macpherson, but also Dr Blair, and the Abbé Cesarotti, the Italian translator of Ossian, should have failed in tracing any mythological ideas in these poems; and that they should even take some pains to apologize for the absence of them. See Sir John Sinclair's *Ossian*, vol. iii. p. 297. *et seq.*—*Note by the Author of the Essay.*

lieve, that the departed were not altogether dead; and finally to believe, that they existed in a separate and superior condition. They supposed them exalted to celestial regions; and that they sojourned among the meteors and the clouds of heaven.

“ A cloud hovers over Cona; its blue circling sides are high; the winds are beneath it, with their wings; within is the dwelling of Fingal. His friends sit around the king, on mist, and hear the songs of Ullin. The lesser heroes, with a thousand meteors, light the airy hall.”

Immediately after the death of a warrior, though the grief of his friends was animated, and led them to adorn him with every great and distinguishing quality, yet, having been so lately one of themselves, they did not invest him with those high powers which they afterwards conferred upon him; and they imagined him, as well as themselves, a sufferer by the change he had undergone. They therefore testified their esteem, and expressed their sorrow, in the most respectful and affectionate manner. But, by this operation, the violence of their grief subsided, and they transferred the com-



fort, which they themselves experienced, to the deceased. They supposed him not only relieved, but happy; and, accordingly, the departed hero did not rise to his airy hall, till his obsequies were duly performed, and that he had heard “the song of his fame.”

“No sleep comes down on Cathmor’s eyes: dark, in his soul, he saw the spirit of low-laid Cairbre: he saw him, without his song, rolled in a blast of the night.”

“Cairbre came to Cathmor’s dreams, half-seen from his low-hung cloud. Joy rose, darkly, in his face; for he had heard the song of Carril: a blast sustained his dark-skirted cloud, which he seized in the bosom of night, as he rose, with his fame, towards his father’s hall. Joy met the soul of Cathmor! his voice was heard in Moilena: the bard gave the song to Cairbre: he travels on the wind: my form is in my father’s hall.”

Agreeably to the same notions, the spirits of men destitute of any merit, or of those whose conduct had incurred infamy, could never rise to celestial mansions; but were rolled, at the mercy

of the winds, plaintive and malignant, over noisome fens, or by the margin of reedy lakes. Those again, whose merit had never been very eminently distinguished, but who had never suffered disgrace, ascended as the attendants of illustrious warriors, and were their ministers in the clouds.

“The lesser heroes, with a thousand meteors,  
“light the airy hall.”

II. After mentioning the place of abode, assigned to departed warriors, it may be proper to illustrate their powers. Divested of the body, they could no longer exert bodily strength and agility. They could bend no bow, but one of aërial texture; nor wield a sword capable of inflicting wounds. Their form was a thin, ethereal, substance; they were unfit for corporeal exertion; and could encounter no adversary, in deeds of valour. Advanced, however, to immortality, celebrated by bards, who magnified their achievements, and revered by surviving friends, they could not be mournful: on the contrary, they had conferred upon them a dominion of mighty power,

and perfectly suited to their present condition. Those natural sentiments of justice, which are inherent in every bosom, tended also to confirm their opinion; for they thought it unjust, or unreasonable, that men, in the actual discharge of important duties, and in the very exercise of distinguished virtue, should be deprived of the advantages, which they deserved, without being otherwise duly compensated; and, if they thought of compensating, their imagination, and convictions of merit, could set no limits to the remuneration. The contrast, between the imbecility of departed spirits, so far as regards bodily exertions, and their power over storms and tempests, is strikingly illustrated, in the following passage:—

“ The blasts of the north open thy gates, O  
“ king! and I behold thee sitting on mist, dimly  
“ gleaming, in all thine arms. Thy form, now, is  
“ not the terror of the valiant; but like a watery  
“ cloud, when we see the stars behind it, with  
“ their weeping eyes. Thy shield is like the aged  
“ moon; thy sword a vapour, half-kindled with  
“ fire. Dim and feeble is the chief, who travelled  
“ in brightness before. But thy steps are on the

“ winds of the desert, and the storms darken in  
 “ thy hand. Thou takest the sun, in thy wrath,  
 “ and hidest him in thy clouds: the sons of little  
 “ men are afraid; and a thousand showers de-  
 “ scend. But, when thou comest forth in thy  
 “ mildness, the gale of morning is near thy course;  
 “ the sun laughs, in his blue fields; and the gray  
 “ stream winds in the valley.”

That the spirits of departed warriors were believed to possess supremacy over the tempests, and that they employed their powers in behalf of their friends, and against their enemies, is manifest, from several passages.

“ As Trenmor, clothed in meteors, descends from  
 “ the halls of thunder, pouring the dark stream  
 “ before him, over the troubled sea, so Colgar de-  
 “ scended to battle.”

The two following extracts not only illustrate their power, but the manner also, in which they might be addressed.

“ If any strong spirit of heaven sits on that low-  
 “ hung cloud, turn his dark ships from the rock,  
 “ thou rider of the storms.”

“ O ye dark winds of Erin, arise! and roar, ye

“whirlwinds of the heath! Amid the tempest, let me die, torn by angry ghosts of men.”

The power ascribed to the spirits of deceased warriors was threefold:—The first was that, which I have now endeavoured to illustrate; namely, the power of ruling the winds, and directing the tempests. The second, of which examples shall now be given, consisted in taking away life, by secret and unseen influences.

It was apprehended, that, if the immortalized, and deified spirits of the deceased, ever interested, as they were supposed to be, in the welfare of those formerly dear to them, perceived them in danger, from unavoidable calamity, they immediately interposed, dissolved the union between the soul and the body, and conveyed their friends, from misery, to enjoy the repose and happiness of their ærial mansions. When Lamor, blind and aged, receives information, that his son had acted so improperly as to incur disgrace, overwhelmed with the misfortune, he thus addresses himself to the ghost of his ancestor:—

“Spirit of the noble Garnallon, carry Lamor to

“ his place: his eyes are dark; his soul is sad; and  
 “ his son hath lost his fame.”

So too Suilmalla, apprehensive about the fate of her husband:—

“ Call me, my father, when the king is low on  
 “ earth; for then shall I be lonely in the midst of  
 “ woe.”

The following passage is quite explicit:—

“ His hand is like the arm of a ghost, when  
 “ he stretches it from a cloud: the rest of his  
 “ thin form is unseen; but the people die in the  
 “ vale.”

Sudden death, without the agency of any visible cause, affects the minds of a rude people, not only with fear, but with astonishment; and they ascribe such alarming events to the tremendous power of superior, invisible, beings. When the army of the Greeks was afflicted with a pestilential malady, the calamity was attributed to the shafts of Apollo. Ossian, in like manner, ascribes appearances, of this nature, to the interposition of some friendly, or unfriendly, spirit.

As the spirits of the dead were believed to rule

in the atmosphere, and to have the power of taking away life, they were apprehended, in the third place, to have the power of prescience ; and that, as they possessed such ability, they were inclined, on fit occasions, to grant a revelation of future events. Man, by nature provident, is for ever looking forward into the timè to come ; and is solicitous about his fortune, in the after periods of his life. He conceives the power of foreseeing what events are about to befall him, and the discovery of them, as a most important talent, and most desirable sort of knowledge. It is natural for him, therefore, if he believe in preternatural rulers, to suppose, that a part of their superiority may consist in prescience. Believing, that they can pass, in their aërial progress, with inconceivable rapidity from one place to another, it is not a violent transition to believe, that they can also pass from one time to another, and discry those events which are to arise, at a future, perhaps not a very distant, period. Imagining, too, that these superior beings may be propitiated by the attentions and prayers of mortals, they will expect the display of their benevolence, in such occasional re-

velation. Moreover, borrowing their notions of these invisible rulers from their own experience and observation, they suppose, that they bear some resemblance to great men upon earth; the more so, if they actually believe them to be no other than illustrious heroes exalted to immortality; and, accordingly, none but their descendents, or persons of distinguished merit, will presume to approach them; nor will even these venture to address them, but as suppliants, filled with awe, and with veneration. The mode of revelation will also be of a corresponding nature. These exalted beings will not deign to make themselves altogether visible; or they will not overwhelm their votaries by the splendour of their glory; and will impart their knowledge obscurely, or by dreams and visions. All these particulars are illustrated in the following sublime, yet very interesting, passage:—

“ Come, (said the hero,) O ye ghosts of my fa-  
“ thers, who fought against the kings of the world,  
“ tell me the deeds of future times, and your con-  
“ verse in your caves, when you talk together, and  
“ behold your sons in the fields of the valiant.  
“ Trenmor came from his hill, at the voice of his



“ mighty son. A cloud, like the steed of the  
“ stranger, supported his limbs; his robe is of the  
“ mist of Lano, that brings death to the people;  
“ his sword is a green meteor, half-extinguished;  
“ his face is without form, and dark. He sighed  
“ thrice over the hero, and thrice the winds of the  
“ night roared aloud. Many were his words to  
“ Oscar; but they only came by halves to our ears:  
“ they were dark, as the tales of other times, before  
“ the light of the song arose.”

It might be shewn, that the religion of the Greeks and Romans proceeds upon similar principles; in like manner also, that of the ancient Egyptians, and that of the ancient Scandinavians. In their great original outlines, they correspond exactly with the mythology exhibited in the Poems of Ossian.\*

\* This Discourse, with the exception of some illustrations lately added, on the first part, was read before a literary society, in Glasgow College, so long ago as the year 1775; and, although a considerable time has now intervened, the Author has not found it necessary to alter, or even to qualify, the opinion, on this subject, which he was then led to entertain.



APPENDIX,

No. III.

---

LETTER

OF

JAMES MACPHERSON, ESQ.

TO

CAPTAIN MORISON.

---

DEAR SIR,

August 18th, 1789.

I RETURN your letter, as Sir John is in the North. Not only Ossian, but much more, is going on; the establishing the whole language, on primitive, clear, unerring, and incontrovertible principles. The Gaelic, now traced to its source, has been already found to be the most regular, the most simple, and the most pleasing to the ear, and

*almost* to the eye, of any language either of past or present times.

You may acquaint our worthy friend, the very respectable amateur of the Gaelic language, Sir James Foulis, of the above general intimation.—

I am,

Very faithfully yours,

(Signed) J. MACPHERSON.

CAPTAIN MORISON, Greenock.

## POSTSCRIPT.

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THE recent publication of the inestimable originals of Ossian, by Sir John Sinclair, Bart. together with a learned dissertation on their authenticity, by himself, and another by Dr Macarthur, whilst it should seem to supersede the necessity of further discussion, renders it, at least, proper to state to the public a few circumstances with respect to the present attempt.

With regard to any superfluous coincidence of argument, between this Essay, and those which have preceded it in publication, it is presumed, that none shall be found. This Essay was *written* some years ago. It was read, in the Author's turn of giving a discourse, in the weekly meetings of the Literary Society in Glasgow College, in the

years 1803, 1804, and 1806. Having formerly received the greatest delight from the perusal of the Seventh Book of Temora, in the original, and from many of the fragments of Gaelic poetry collected by Dr Smith, it had long been his most earnest wish to see the whole originals of Mr Macpherson's translations given to the public. It was, therefore, with the greatest pleasure, that he observed, in 1806, the intimation of their speedy appearance, by Sir John Sinclair.

He delayed the publication of this Essay for more than a year, in the expectation of the accomplishment of this promise; but much time having elapsed, he began again to lose all hope of seeing these valuable originals in their native dress. It was only after every arrangement had been made for the publication of this Essay, that the Author, on his way to Edinburgh, observed, for the first time, the splendid work of Sir John Sinclair announced in a London newspaper.

It is, *besides*, necessary to take notice of this circumstance, in order to account for the manner in which the original poetry of Ossian is spoken of throughout this Essay, as still unpublished. Though

the Author has seen this great work, since his Essay went to press, it was too late to change its form, or to accommodate it to existing circumstances; nor did it appear to be of material consequence to make such an alteration. The Seventh Book of Temora, alone, is sufficient to establish the argument of the incalculable superiority of the original verse to Mr Macpherson's prose translation; and the manner in which the subject is here spoken of, may even serve to shew how much the publication of this poetry had been desiderated amongst us, as well as the anticipations which had been formed of its intrinsic excellence.

This singular poetry is now before the public. It will speak for itself, and fully support every argument, which has been founded on the anticipation of its superior merit. As far as the Author has hitherto had an opportunity of examining these originals, they appear to be, throughout, of an excellence and dignity similar and equal to the Seventh Book of Temora. This whole Book, in particular, the Author has diligently compared, in Sir

John's edition, and in that which he now offers to the public. There appears to be no material difference. In Sir John's, there occur some errors in orthography, not easily to be avoided in the Gaelic language. Thus, amongst others, we have in verse 407, *benan* for *beann*. From verse 383 to the end of verse 389, the difficulty of a difficult passage is increased, by the want of punctuation. In all this passage, the eye is relieved only by one semicolon.

I observe, that, in verses 102 and 346, Sir John reads *ciar*, "dark," instead of *cearr*, "oblique," as Mr Macdiarmed had it. *Ciar* is not unsuitable to the sense of these passages; but, perhaps, *cearr* is more poetical.

*Brunadh*, in verse 199, seems to be a provincial term; *pronnadh* is surely better.

*Ciabh-bhog*, as Sir John has it, verse 167, is neither so agreeable to the sense, or to the ear, as *ciabhag*.

In Sir John's edition, the whole beauty of a passage, cited above as a fine instance of the parallelism, or balancing, of the verses of the couplet, is lost, by reading *mo shollus*, instead of *am shollus*.



With Sir John, and also in Mr Macfarlane's Latin translation, it is,

“ I arise, my light, (i. e. my love,) from the contest,  
 “ Like a meteor of night from the bursting cloud.”

In the edition offered above, it is,

“ I arise like a light from the contest,  
 “ Like a meteor of night from the bursting cloud.”

These, however, are venial; perhaps, in a work of such extent, unavoidable errors. The treasure of verse, now presented to the public, has not been surpassed, in importance and value, since the period in which the poetry of Homer was first ushered into the world by Lycurgus. The time will arrive, when it shall be duly estimated by the public.

Yet much remains still to be done. Mr Macpherson deserves, and shall have, his full meed of praise. At an auspicious period, he brought the scattered limbs of the bard together, and arranged them not unhappily; but a skilful anatomist may still discover many members disjointed and mis-

placed; a reduction of some parts may be necessary. Cesarotti has already remarked, concerning one episode, that it is not introduced in its proper place. Celtic scholars may yet find occupation in restoring these valuable poems to their genuine order and form.

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